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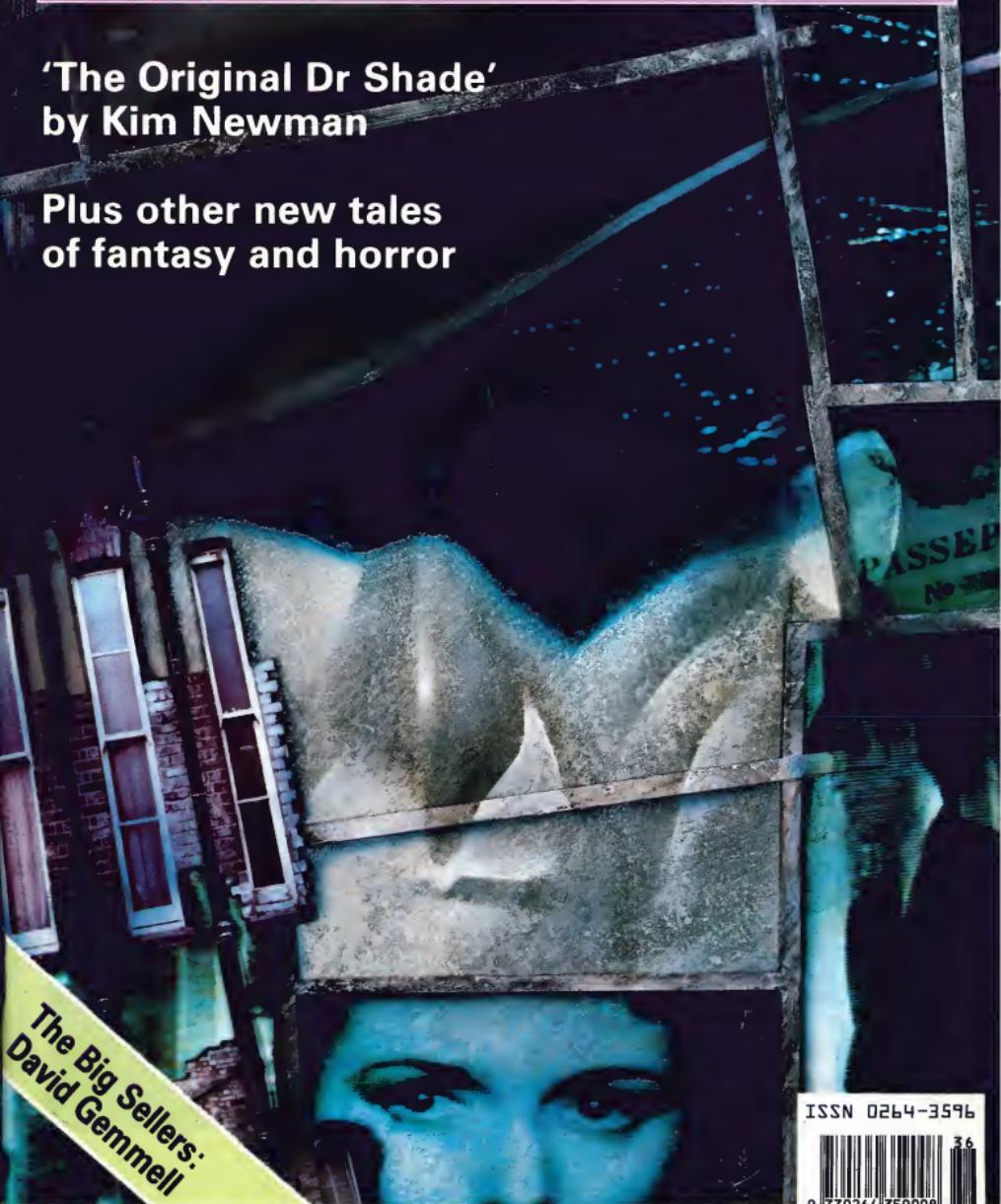
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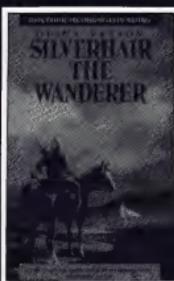
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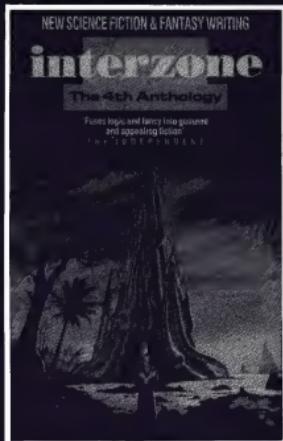
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**Subscriptions:** £23.00 for one year  
(12 issues) in the UK. Cheques or  
postal orders should be crossed  
and made payable to *Interzone*.  
Overseas subscriptions are £25.00,  
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# interzone

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No 36

June 1990

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**Cover by Dave McKean** for Kim Newman's novel *The Night Mayor* (courtesy of Hodder & Stoughton Ltd.)

Published monthly.  
All material is © *Interzone*, 1990

**ISSN 0264-3596**  
Printed by Acorn Web Offset Ltd, Bradford

Trade distribution through Diamond-Europress  
Sales & Distribution, Unit 1,  
Burgess Rd., Ivyhouse Lane,  
Hastings, E. Sussex TN35 4NR  
(tel. 0424 430422)

Bookshop distribution through Central Books,  
14 The Leathermarket, London SE1 3ER  
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# Interface

## David Pringle

A few of you may have seen an article by Colin Greenland, "In Search of the Technogoth," which appeared in the March 1990 issue of *The Face*. It began: "What's the future of British science fiction?" Charles Stross asked me that, recalls author and editor Robert Holdstock. "I said, 'I don't know, Charles, what is the future of British science fiction?'" "Technogoth!" he said. "Technogoth!" And he went off chuckling, with this gleam in his eye. Science fiction is more than just a genre. It's a subculture as intense as any club scene... Now there's soon to be technogoth. As yet, nobody but Charles Stross knows what it is."

In his generally sharp and amusing piece, Colin gives an account of various recent books, praising Geoff Ryman's fine novel *The Child Garden* in particular, and proceeds to drop various names — among them those of Gill Alderman, Ian McDonald, Kim Newman, Eric Brown, Stephen Baxter, Nicola Griffith... and Charles Stross ("in many ways the best of the bunch"). He also refers to Interzone a couple of times — only fitting, in that we discovered all the writers he mentions, with the exceptions of Alderman and McDonald. Naturally, we're delighted with this publicity for our efforts.

### WHERE ARE ALL THE TECHNOGOTHS?

However, as an account of recent British sf, Colin's article was as notable for its omissions as its inclusions. There was no mention of such established writers as Ian Watson and Brian Stableford (the latter, in particular, is now producing his best work). But admittedly the emphasis in the piece was on newer names. In which case, it's a pity Colin didn't refer to Interzone discovery Neil Ferguson, as stylish, witty and wayward a writer of imaginative fiction as one could hope to come across. And...

On the very day that I read the piece in *The Face* I had just come from meetings with two of the leading sf book editors — Richard Evans of Gollancz and Deborah Beale of Century Hutchinson — and the first name on both pairs of lips had been that of Paul J. McAuley, whose two books to date have been published by Gollancz. Apparently, Paul's big new sf novel, *Eternal Light* (to appear in 1991), is quite something. Having read an early version in manuscript, Deborah tried to buy the book for the Century/Legend line. But Richard

Evans hung on fiercely, and now Paul McAuley is to be promoted as one of the major names of the Gollancz sf list — perhaps he'll be pushed as "the British Greg Bear." Such publicity ploys are always a bit crass, but certainly I agree that McAuley, another Interzone author, has the potential to be the most notable writer in British sf for the year 2000. We'll see.

Nor did Colin Greenland mention Keith Brooke, who has now sold not just one but three novels, all to be hardbacked (so Richard Evans told me) by Gollancz and paperbacked by Corgi Books: obviously a coming name — and one whose debut story, "Adrenotropic Man," appeared as recently as Interzone 30. Other IZ writers Colin could have picked as potential winners include Greg Egan (an Australian) and Ian R. MacLeod — both inform me that they are now selling stories to the leading US title Asimov's as well as to this magazine. Then there are Susan Beeston, Richard Calder, Lyle Hopwood, Simon Ings, William King, Ian Lee and others who have already made at least a small mark. The present climate is as good as any we can recall for the publication of new sf writers in Britain. Editors such as Richard Evans and Deborah Beale are actively searching out new authors of talent (as are Malcolm Edwards at Grafton books, who recently signed up Stephen Baxter, and Kathy Gale at Pan Books, who is about to publish Eric Brown). Interzone has played an important part in all this, and we shall continue to do so.

We have a new story by Mr Technogoth himself, Charles Stross, coming up in our next issue. Cyberpunk, steampunk, Radical Hard SF or technogoth — who cares? If such labels enable the new British sf to be discussed in glossy style magazines such as *The Face*, well and good. The important thing is that new sf and fantasy is being produced in this country — it's fresh, it's exciting, and there's plenty of it. And you can look for it first in these pages.

### MORE INTERZONE SURVEY RESULTS

As I said last issue, approximately 2,000 IZ subscribers were mailed a questionnaire with issue 33. Of these, 515 replied by the end of January 1990 — a greater than 25% response rate, which I am assured by people with experience of readership surveys is a

fantastic result. I reported on the outcome of the writers', artists' and non-fiction contributors' popularity polls last time. The remaining questions and answers on the ballot forms have now been analyzed in detail to produce the following results. (Where percentage totals do not quite add up to 100, this is because of rounding.)

#### What sex are you?

Male: 81%	Female: 19%
-----------	-------------

A displeasing result: we wish it were better balanced. Before seeing these poll results, and judging purely from sight of the names on our subscription list, I would have hazarded a guess that the split was more in the region of 70%-30% — perhaps female readers are less inclined to answer questionnaires?

#### How old are you?

15-19: 9%	20-24: 25%
25-29: 22%	30-34: 19%
35-39: 12%	40-49: 10%
50-59: 1%	60+: 2%

Here 56% of Interzone's readers are under 30 years old — or 87% are under 40 — which amounts to a fairly youthful readership, but definitely not a "juvenile" one in the usual sense of the term.

#### Are you...?

Single: 64%	
Married (or living with a partner): 33%	
Divorced: 2%	Widowed: 1%
There are a lot of "singles," which should please potential advertisers since it means (in theory) that you have more money to spend.	

#### How many children live with you?

None: 82%	One: 8%
Two: 7%	Three+: 2%
Most of our readers are child-free, which seems slightly alarming — but I'm not sure why. (Perhaps we should be urging you to procreate.) On the other hand, advertisers like it: it should mean you have more disposable income.	

#### Are you currently...?

Employed full-time: 59%	
At school, college or university: 17%	
Self-employed: 9%	
Not employed: 8%	
Employed part-time: 3%	
Full-time or part-time child carer: 2%	
Retired: 2%	

Continued on page 73

# The Original Dr Shade

## Kim Newman

Like a shark breaking inky waters, the big black car surfaced out of the night, its searchlight headlamps freezing the Bolsheviks en tableau as they huddled over their dynamite. Cohen, their vile leader, tried to control his raging emotions, realizing that yet again his schemings to bring about the ruination of the British Empire were undone. Borzoff, his hands shaking uncontrollably, fell to his ragged-trousered knees and tried one last prayer to the God whose icons he had spat upon that day in the mother country when he had taken his riflebutt to the princess' eggshell-delicate skull. Petrofsky drooled into his stringy beard, his one diseased eye shrinking in the light like a slug exposed to salt, and uselessly thumb-cocked his revolver.

The canvas top of the Rolls Royce "Shadowshark" raised like a hawk's eyelid, and a dark shape seemed to grow out of the driver's seat, cloak billowing in the strong wind, twin moons reflected in the insectlike dark goggles, wide-brimmed hat at a jaunty angle.

Petrofsky raised his shaking pistol, and slammed back against the iron globe of the chemical tank, cut down by another silent dart from the doctor's famous airgun. In the distance, the conspirators could hear police sirens, but they knew they would not be taken into custody. The shadowman would not allow them to live out the night to further sully the green and fruitful soil of sacred England with their foul presence.

As the doctor advanced, the headlamps threw his expanding shadow on the Bolsheviks.

Israel Cohen, the Mad Genius of the Revolution, trembled, his flabby chins slapping against his chest, sweat pouring from his ape-like forehead down his protuberant nose to his fleshy, sensual lips. He raised a ham-sized fist against the doctor, sneering insane defiance to the last:

"Curse you, Shade!"

— Rex Cash, *Dr Shade Vs the Dynamite Boys* (1936)

**T**hey ate an expensively minimalist meal at Alastair Little's in Frith Street, and Basil Crosbie, Leech's Art Editor, picked up the bill with his company card. Throughout, Tamara, his agent, kept reminding Crosbie of the Eagle awards Greg had gained for *Fat Chance*, not mentioning that that was two years ago. As with most restaurants, there was nowhere that could safely accommodate Greg's yard-square artwork folder, and he was worried the sample strips would get scrunched or warped. He would have brought copies, but wanted to put himself over as sharply as possible. Besides, the ink wasn't dry on the pieces he had finished this morning. As usual, there hadn't been time to cover himself.

Whenever there was dead air in the conversation, Tamara filled it with more selected highlights from Greg's career. Greg guessed she had invited herself to this lunch to keep him under control. She remembered, but was carefully avoiding mention of, his scratchy beginnings in the '70s — spiky strips and singletons

for punk fanzines like *Sheep Worrying*, *Brainrape* and *Kill Your Pet Puppy* — and knew exactly how he felt about the Derek Leech organization. She probably thought he was going to turn up in a ripped rubbish bag, with lots of black eyeliner and safety-pins through his earlobes, then go for Crosbie with a screwdriver. Actually, while the Sex Pistols were swearing on live television and gobbling at gigs, he had been a neatly-dressed, normal-haired art student. It was only at the easel, where he used to assemble police-brutality collages with ransom note captions, that he had embodied the spirit of '77.

If Tamara would shut up, he thought he could get on with Crosbie. Greg knew the man had started out on the Eagle, and filled in on Garth once in a while. He had been a genuine minor talent in his day. Still, he worked for Leech, and if there was one artefact that summed up everything Greg loathed about Britain under late Thatcherism, it was Leech's Daily Comet. The paper was known for its Boobs 'n' Pubes, its multi-million Giveaway Grids, its unflinching support of the diamond-hard right, its lawsuit-fuelled muckraking, and prose that read like a football hooligan's attempt to imitate the *Janet and John* books. It was Britain's fastest-growing newspaper, and the hub of a communications empire that was putting Leech in the Murdoch-Maxwell bracket. In Madame Tussaud's last annual poll, the statue of Derek Leech had ranked eighth on the Most Admired list, between Gorbachev and Prince Charles, and second on the Most Hated and Feared chart, after Margaret Thatcher but before Adolf Hitler, Colonel Qaddafi, Count Dracula and the Yorkshire Ripper.

Crosbie didn't start talking business until eyeglass-sized cups of coffee arrived. With the plates taken away, the Art Editor opened his folder on the table, and brought out a neatly paperclipped set of notes. Tamara was still picking at her fruit salad, five pieces of pale apple and/or pear floating in a steel bowl of water with a solitary grape. She and Crosbie had been drinking dry white wine with the meal, but Greg stuck to mineral water. The gritty coffee gave him quite a punch, and he felt his heart tighten like an angry fist. Since *Fat Chance*, he hadn't done anything notable. This was an important meeting for him. Tamara might not dump him if it didn't come out right, but she might shift him from her A-list to her B-list.

"As you probably know," Crosbie began, "Leech United Kingdom is expanding at the moment. I don't know if you keep up with the trades, but Derek has recently bought up the rights to a lot of defunct titles

with a view to relaunch. It's a lot easier to sell something familiar than something new. Just now, Derek's special baby is the *Evening Argus*."

"The Brighton paper?" Greg asked.

"No, a national. It folded in 1953, but it was very big from the '20s through to the War. Lord Badgerfield ran it."

"I have heard of it," Greg said. "It's always an Argus headline in those old films about Dunkirk."

"That's right. The paper had what they used to call 'a good War'. Churchill called it 'the voice of true democracy'. Like Churchill, it was never quite the same after the War... but now, what with the interest in the 50th anniversary of the Battle of Britain and all that, we think the time is right to bring it back. It'll be nostalgia, but it'll be new too..."

"Gasmasks and rationing and the spirit of the Blitz, eh?"

"That sort of thing. It'll come out in the Autumn, and we'll build up to it with a massive campaign. 'The voice is back.' We'll cut from this ovaline-type '40s look to an aggressive '90s feel, yuppies on car-phones, designer style, full-colour pages. It'll be a harder news paper than the *Comet*, but it'll still be a Leech UK product, populist and commercial. We aim to be the turn-of-the-century newspaper."

"And you want a cartoonist?"

Crosbie smiled. "I liked your *Fat Chance* work a lot, Greg. The script was a bit manky for my taste, but you draw with clear lines, good solid blocks of black. Your private eye was a thug, but he looked like a real strip hero. There was a bit of Jeff Hawke there. It was just what we want for the *Argus*, the feel of the past but the content of the present."

"So you'll be wanting Greg to do a *Fat Chance* strip for the new paper?"

Greg had made the connection, and was cracking a smile.

"No, Tamara, that's not what he wants. I've remembered the other thing I know about the *Argus*. I should have recognized the name straight off. It's a byword..."

Crosbie cut in, "that's right. The *Mirror* had Jane and Garth, but the *Argus* had..."

Greg was actually excited. He thought he had grown up, but there was still a pulp heart in him. As a child, he had pored through second- and third-hand books and magazines. Before *Brainrape* and *Fat Chance* and *PC Rozzerblade*, he had tried to draw his other heroes: Bulldog Drummond, the Saint, Sexton Blake, Biggles, and...

"Dr Shade."

"You may haft caught me, Herr Doktor Schotten, but ze glory off ze Sird Reich vill roll over zis passetic country like a tchuggernaucht. I die for ze greater glory off Tchermany, off ze Nazi party and off Adolf Hitler..."

"That's where you're wrong, Von Spielsdorf. I wouldn't dirty my hands by killing you, even if it is what you so richly deserve."

"Ain't we gonna ice the lousy stinkin' rat, Doc?" asked Hank the Yank. The American loomed over the German mastermind, snub-nosed automatic in his meaty fist.

"Yours is a young country, Henry," said Dr Shade gently, laying a black-gloved hand of restraint upon his comrade's arm. "That's not how we do things in England. Von Spielsdorf here may be shot as a spy, but that decision is not ours to make. We have courts and laws and justice. That's what

this whole war's about, my friend. The right of the people to have courts and laws and justice. Even you, Von Spielsdorf. We're fighting for your rights too."

"Pah, decadent Englische Scheweinhund!"

Hank tapped the German on the forehead with his pistol-grip, and the saboteur sat down suddenly, his eyes rolling upwards.

"That showed him, eh, Doc?"

Dr Shade's thin, normally inexpressive lips, curled in a slight smile.

"Indubitably, Henry. Indubitably."

— Rex Cash, "The Fiend of the Fifth Column",

Dr Shade Monthly No 111, (May, 1943)

**T**he heart of Leech UK was a chrome-and-glass pyramid in London docklands, squatting by the Thames like a recently-arrived flying saucer. Greg felt a little queasy as the minicab they had sent for him slipped through the pickets. It was a chilly Spring day, and there weren't many of them about. Crosbie had warned him of "the Union Ludites" and their stance against the new technology that enabled Leech to put out the *Comet* and its other papers with a bare minimum of production staff. Greg hoped none of the placard-carriers would recognize him. Last year, there had been quite a bit of violence as the pickets, augmented by busloads of radicals as annoyed by Leech's editorials as his industrial relations policies, came up against the police and a contingent of the *Comet*-reading skinheads who were the backbone of Leech's support. Now, the dispute dragged on but was almost forgotten. Leech's papers had never mentioned it much, and the rest of the press had fresher strikes, revolutions and outrages to cover.

The minicab drove right into the pyramid, into an enclosed reception area where the vehicle was checked by security guards. Greg was allowed out and issued with a blue day pass that a smiling girl in a smart uniform pinned on his lapel.

Behind her desk were framed colour shots of smiling girls without uniforms, smart or otherwise, their nipples like squashed cherries, their faces cleanly unexpressive. The *Comet Knock-Outs* were supposed to be a national institution. But so, according to the *Comet*, were corporal punishment in schools, capital punishment for supporters of Sinn Fein, and the right to tell lies about the sexual preferences of soap opera performers. Greg wondered what Penny Stamp — Girl Reporter, Dr Shade's sidekick in the old strip, would have made of a *Comet Knock-Out*. Penny had always been rowing with the editor who wanted her to cover fashion shows and garden parties when she would rather be chasing crime scoops for the front page; perhaps her modern equivalent should be a pin-up girl who wants to keep her clothes on and become Roger Cook or Woodward and Bernstein?

He rode up the 23rd floor, which was where Crosbie had arranged to meet him. The girl downstairs had telephoned up, and her clone was waiting for him in the thickly-carpeted lobby outside the lift. She smiled, and escorted him through an open-plan office where telephones and computers were being installed by a cadre of workmen. At the far end were a series of glassed-off cubicles. She eased him into one of these, and asked if he wanted tea or coffee. She brought him instant coffee, the granules floating near the bottom of a paper cupful of hot brown water. There was a dummy edition of the *Evening Argus* on the

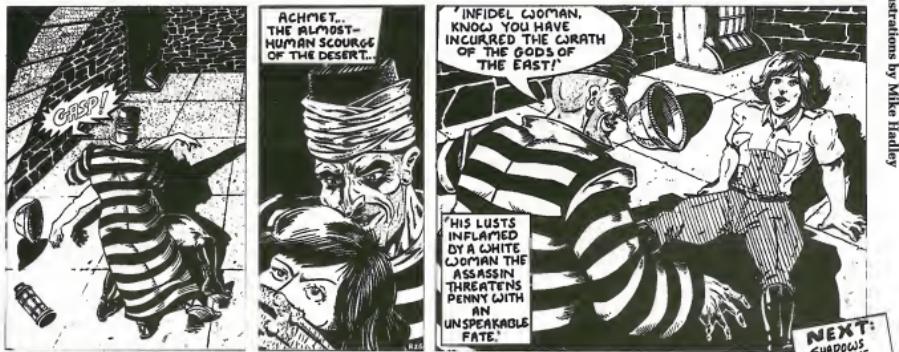


# DR SHADE

BY REX CASH

CLUTCH OF THE ASSASSIN!!!!

PENNY STAMP, GIRL REPORTER, INVESTIGATING THE CURSE OF THE PHARAOH, AND MEMBERS OF THE EXPEDITION, SEARCHES FRANTICALLY THROUGH THE VULTURES OF ANUBIS, GEMINI....



'Dr Shade and the Pharaoh's Curse' by Rex Cash (Donald Moncrieff) Fitzgerald, Episode 26, Evening Argus, Wednesday 28th July 1937

desk. The headline was "IT'S WAR!" Greg didn't have time to look at it.

Crosbie came in with a tall, slightly stooped man, and ordered more coffee. The newcomer was in his 70s, but looked fit for his age. He wore comfortable old trousers and a cardigan under a new sports jacket. Greg knew who he was.

"Rex Cash?" he asked, his hand out.

The man's grip was firm. "One of him," he said. "Not the original."

"This is Harry Lipman, Greg."

"Harry," Harry said.

"Greg. Greg Daniels."

"Fat Chance?"

Greg nodded. He was surprised Harry had kept up with the business. He had been retired for a long time, he knew.

"Mr Crosbie told me. I've been looking your stuff out. I don't know much about the drawing side. Words are my line. But you're a talented young man."

"Thanks."

"Can we work together?" Harry was being direct. Greg didn't have an answer.

"I hope so."

"So do I. It's been a long time. I'll need someone to snip the extra words out of the panels."

Harry Lipman had been Rex Cash from 1939 to 1952, taking over the name from Donald Moncrieff, the creator of Dr Shade. He had filled 58 Dr Shade books with words, 42 novels and 135 short stories, and he had scripted the newspaper strip all the while, juggling storylines. Several of the best-known artists in British adventure comics had worked on the Dr Shade strip—Mack Bullivant, who would create Andy of the Arsenal for British Pluck, Tommy Wrathall, highly regarded for his commando and paratroop stories in Boys' War, and, greatest of all, Frank Fitzgerald, who had, for six years, made Dr Shade dark, funny and almost magical. They were all dead now. Harry was the last survivor of those days. And so the Argus was calling in Greg to fill the footprints.

"Harry has been working up some storylines," said Crosbie. "I'll leave you to tell them through. If you need more coffee, give Nicola a buzz. I'll be back in a few hours to see how you're doing."

Crosbie left. Harry and Greg looked at each other and, for no reason, started laughing like members of a family sharing a joke they could never explain to an outsider.

"Considering Dr Shade must be about 150 now," Harry began, "I thought we'd start the strip with him trying to get the DHSS to up his heating allowance for the winter..."

**SHADE, DOCTOR** Scientific vigilante of mysterious origins, usually hidden behind a cloak and goggle-like dark glasses, although also a master of disguise with many other identities. Operating out of an outwardly dilapidated but inwardly luxurious retreat in London's East End, he employs a group of semi-criminal bully boys in his never-ending war against foreign elements importing evil into the heart of the British Empire. Originally introduced (under the name "Dr Jonathan Shadow") as a minor character in *The Cue of Limehouse* (1929), a novel by Rex Cash (Donald Moncrieff), in which he turns up in the final chapters to help the aristocratic pugilist hero Reggie Brandon defeat the East End opium warlord Baron Quon. The character was so popular with the readers of *Wendover's Magazine*, the monthly publication in which the novel was serialized, that Moncrieff wrote several series of short adventures, later collected in the volumes *Dr Shadow and the Poison Goddess* (1931) and *Dr Shadow's Nigger Trouble* (1932). In 1934, alleging plagiarism of their character, the SHADOW, Street and Smith threatened to sue Badgerfield, publishers of *Wendover's* and of the collections, and, to appease the American firm, the character was renamed Dr Shade.

A semi-supernatural, ultra-patriotic avenger whose politics would seem to be somewhat to the right of those of Sapper's Bulldog DRUMMOND or the real-life Oswald Mosley (of whom Moncrieff was reputed to be a great admirer), Dr Shade is much given to executing minor villains with his aruron and gruesomely torturing them for information. He appeared in nearly 100 short novels, all credited to Rex Cash, written for *Dr Shade Monthly*, a pulp periodical issued by Badgerfield from 1934 until 1947. The house pseudonym was also used by a few other writers, mostly for back-up stories in the 1930s, when the prolific Mon-

Illustrations by Mike Hadley

Moncrieff's inspiration flagged. The character became even more popular when featured in a daily strip in the *Evening Argus*, most famously drawn by Frank Fitzgerald, from 1935 to 1952. Moncrieff, after a bitter dispute with Lord Badgerfield, stopped writing Dr Shade in 1939, and the strip was taken over by Harry Lipman, a writer who had done a few Dr Shade stories for the magazine. By the outbreak of war, Lipman had effectively become Rex Cash, and was producing stories and novels for the magazine as well as scripting the comic.

Lipman's Dr Shade is a less frightening figure than Moncrieff's. Although his uniform and gadgets are unchanged, Lipman's hero was an official agent of the British government who refrained from sadistically mistreating his enemies they way Moncrieff's had. It was revealed that Dr Shade is really Dr Jonathan Chambers, an honest and dedicated general practitioner, and the supernatural elements of the strip were toned down. During WW II, Dr Shade's politics changed; as written by Moncrieff, he is an implacable foe of the non-white races and international communism, but Lipman's hero is a straightforward defender of democracy in the face of the Nazi menace. Moncrieff's Moriarty figure, introduced in *Dr Shade and the Whooping Horror* (1934), is Israel Cohen, a stereotypically Jewish master criminal in league with Russian anarchists and Indian Thuggees in a plot to destroy Britain's naval superiority. During the War, Cohen was retired – although he returned in the late 1940s as a comic East End nightclub owner and friend of Dr Shade – and the pnumbral adventurer, joined by two-fisted American OSS agent Harry Hemingway and peppy girl reporter Penny Stamp, concentrated exclusively on licking Hitler.

Moncrieff's Dr Shade novels include *Dr Shade Vs the Dynamite Boys* (1936), *A Yellow Man's Treachery* (1936), *Dr Shade's Balkan Affair* (1937), *To the Last Drop of Our British Blood* (1937), *The Bulldog Bites Back* (1937), *The International Conspirators* (1938) and *Dr Shade in Suez* (1939), while Lipman's are *Dr Shade's Home Front* (1940), *Underground in France* (1941), *Dr Shade Takes Over* (1943), *Dr Shade in Tokyo* (1945), *Dr Shade Buries the Hatchet* (1948) and *The Piccadilly Gestapo* (1951). The character also featured in films, beginning with *Dr Shade's Phantom Taxi Mystery* (1938; dir. Michael Powell), in which he was played by Raymond Massey, while Francis L. Sullivan was a decidedly non-Semitic Israel Cohen, renamed "Idris Kobon." Valentine Dyall took the role in a BBC Radio serial from 1943 to 1946, and Ronald Howard wore the cloak in a 1963 Rediffusion TV serial, *Introducing Dr Shade...*, with Elizabeth Shepherd as Penny Stamp and Alfie Bass as Israel Cohen.

See also: Dr Shade's associates: Reggie BRANDON, Lord Highbury and Islington; Henry HEMINGWAY (Hank the Yank); Penny STAMP, Girl Reporter; and his enemies: Israel COHEN, the Mad Genius of the Revolution; ACHMET the Almost Human; Melchior Umberto GASPARD, Prince of Forgers; Professor IZAN, the Führer's Favourite.

— David Pringle, *Imaginary People: A Who's Who of Modern Fictional Characters* (1987)

**G**reg and Harry Lipman met several times over the next few weeks, mainly away from the Leech building. In Soho pubs and cheap restaurants, they discussed the direction of the new Dr Shade strip. Greg had liked Harry immediately, and came to admire his still-quick storyteller's mind. He knew he could work with this man. Having taken Dr Shade over from Donald Moncrieff, he didn't have a creator's obsessive attachment to the property, and was open to suggestions that would change the frame of the strip. Harry agreed that there was no point in producing a '40s pastiche. Their Dr Shade had to be different from all the character's previous incarnations, but still maintain some of the continuity. Gradually, their ideas came together.

In keeping with the *Argus'* stated old-but-new approach, they decided to set the strip in the near future. Everybody was talking about the turn of the century. They would have Dr Shade come out of retirement, disenchanted with the post-war world he fought for back in the old days, and assembling a new team of adventurers to tackle up-to-the-moment villains against a backdrop of urban decay and injustice. Greg suggested pitting the avenging shadowman against rapacious property speculators laying waste to his old East End stamping grounds, a Crack cartel posing as a fundamentalist religious sect, corporate despilers of the environment, or unethical stockbrokers with Mafia connections.

"You know," Harry said one afternoon in *The Posts*, sipping his pint, "if Donald were writing these stories, Dr Shade would be on the side of those fellers. He died thinking he'd lost everything, and here we are, half a century later, with a country the original Dr Shade would have been proud of."

Nearby, a bored mid-afternoon drinker, swallows tattooed on his neck, zapped spaceships, his beeping deathrays cutting into the piped jazz. Greg pulled open his bag of salt-and-vinegar crisps. "I don't know much about Moncrieff. Even the reference books are pretty sketchy. What was he like?"

"I didn't really know the man, Greg. To him, Lipmans were like Cohens... not people you talked to."

"Was he really a fascist?"

"Oh yes," Harry's eyes got a little larger. "Nobody had a shirt blacker than Donald Moncrieff. The whole kit and kaboodle, he had: glassy eyes, toothbrush moustache, thin blonde hair. Marched through Brixton with Mosley a couple of times. Smashed up my brother's newsagent's shop, they did. And he went on goodwill jaunts to Spain and Germany. I believe he wrote pamphlets for the British Union of Fascists, and he certainly conned poor old Frank into designing a recruiting poster for the Cause."

"Frank Fitzgerald?"

"Yes, your predecessor with the pencils. Frank never forgave Donald for that. During the war, the intelligence people kept interrogating Frank whenever there was a bit of suspected sabotage. You know the line in *Casablanca*? 'Round up the usual suspects.' Well, Donald put Frank on the list of 'usual suspects.'

The space cadet burned out. He swore and thumped the machine as it flashed its "Game Over" sneer at him.

"Were you brought in specifically to change Dr Shade?"

"Oh yes. Badgerfield was an appeasement man right up until Munich, but he was a smart newspaper boy and saw the change in the wind. He dumped a lot of people – not just fascists, lots of pacifists got tarred with the same brush – and about-faced his editorial policy. You'd think he'd overlook the comic strip, but he didn't. He knew it was as much a part of the *Argus* as the editorial pages and his own 'Honest Opinion' column. My orders when I took over were quite blunt. He told me to 'de-Nazify' Dr Shade."

"What happened to Moncrieff?"

"Oh, he sued and sued and sued, but Badgerfield owned the character and could do what he wanted. When the War started, he became very unpopular, of course. He spent some time in one of those holiday

camps they set up for Germans and Italians and sympathizers. They didn't have much concrete on him, and he came back to London. He wrote some books, I think, but couldn't get them published. I heard he had a stack of Dr Shade stories he was never able to use because only His Lordship had the right to exploit the character. Then, he died..."

"He was young, wasn't he?"

"Younger than me. It was the Blitz. They tried to say he was waving a torch in the blackout for the Lüftwaffe, but I reckon he was just under the wrong bomb at the wrong time. I saw him near the end, and he was pretty cracked. Not at all the privileged smoothie he'd been in the '30s. I didn't like the feller, of course, but you had to feel sorry for him. He thought Hitler was Jesus Christ, and the War just drove him off his head. Lots of Englishmen like that, there were. You don't hear much about them these days."

"I don't know. They all seem to be in Parliament now."

Harry chuckled. "Too right, but Dr Shade'll see to 'em, you bet, eh?"

They raised their drinks and toasted the avenging shadow, the implacable enemy of injustice, intolerance and ill-will.

#### IN PRAISE OF BRITISH HERO'S

Those of us PROUD TO BE BRITISH know that in this nations HOUR OF DIREST NEED, the True Blue BRITISH HERO'S will appear and STAND TALL TOGETHER to WIPE FROM THE FACE OF THIS FAIR FLOWER OF A LAND those who BESMERCH IT'S PURITY. With the WHITE BRITON'S in danger of drowning under the tidal wave of COLOURED, and the dedicated and law-upholding BRITISH POLICE going unarmed against the SEMITEX BOMBS, OOZY MACHINE GUNS and ROCKET LAUNCHERS of the KINK-HAIRED NIGGER'S, MONEY-GRUBBING YIDS, ARSE-BANDIT AID-S-SPREADERS, SLANT-EYED KUNGFU CHINKIE'S, LONG-HAIRED HIPPY RABBLE, LOONY LEFT LESBIANS, and RAGHEADED MUSULMEN, the time has come for KING ARTHUR to return from under the hill, for the CROSS OF ST GEORGE to fly from the banners of the CRUSADERS OF CHRISTENDOM, for ROBIN HOOD to come back from the greenwood of Avalon, for the archers of GRECY to notch up their arrows on the orders of GOOD KING HENRY THE FIFTH, for ADMIRAL HORATIO NELSON to take command of the STOUT-HEARTED FLEET, for RAJAH BROOKE OF SARA-WAK to show the coons and gooks and spooks and poofs whats what, for the MURDER of GENERAL GORDON to be avenged with the blood of AY-RAB troublemakers, for DICK TURPIN to rob the JEW-INFESTED coffers of the INVADING IMMIGRANT VERMIN AND FILTH, for DR SHADE to use his airgun on the enemies of WHITE LIBERTY...

The time will come soon when all GOOD BRITISH MEN will have to dip their FISTS in PAKKYNIGGERYIDCHINK-AY-RAB BLOOD to make clean for the healthy WHITE babies of our women this sacred island. The STINKING SCUM with their DOG-EATING, their DISGUSTING UN-CHRISTIAN RITUAL PRACTICES, their PIG-SCREWING, CHILD-RAPING, MARRIAGE-ARRANGING, DISEASE-SPREADING habits will be thrown off the WHITE cliffs of Dover and swept out to sea as we, THE TRUE INHABITANTS OF GREAT BRITAIN, reclaim the homes, the jobs, the lands and the women that are ours by DIVINE RIGHT.

KING ARTHUR! ST GEORGE! DR SHADE!

Today, go out and glassbottle a chinkie waiter, rapefuck a stinking coon bitch, piss burning petrol in a pakky newsagent, stick the boot to a raghead, hang a queer, shit in a sinnagog, puke on a lesbian. IT'S YOUR LEGAL RIGHT! IT'S YOUR DUTY! IT'S YOUR DESTINY!

ARTHUR is COMING BACK! DR SHADE WILL RETURN!

Our's is the RIGHT, our's is the GLORY, our's is the ONLY TRUE JUSTICE! We shall PREVALE!

We are the SONS OF DR SHADE!

— "Johnny British Man," Britannia Rules fanzine,

Issue 37, June 1991.

(Confiscated by police at a South London football fixture.)

**H**arry had given him a map of the estate, but Greg still got lost. The place was one of those '60s wastelands, concrete slabs now disfigured by layers of spray-painted hatred, odd little depressions clogged with rubbish, more than a few burned-out or derelict houses. There was loud Heavy Metal coming from somewhere, and teenagers hung about in menacing gaggles, looking at him with empty, hostile eyes as they compared tattoos or passed bottles. One group was inhaling something — glue? — from a brown paper bag. He looked at them a moment or two longer than he should have, and they stared defiance. A girl whose skin haircut showed the odd bumps of her skull flashed him the V sign.

He kept his eyes on the ground and got more lost. The numbering system of the houses was irregular and contradictory, and Greg had to go round in circles for a while. He asked for directions from a pair of henna-redheaded teenage girls sitting on a wall, and they just shrugged their shoulders and went back to chewing gum. One of the girls was pregnant, her swollen belly pushing through her torn T-shirt, bursting the buttons of her jeans fly.

Greg was conscious that even his old overcoat was several degrees smarter than the norm in this area, and that that might mark him as a mugging target. He also knew that he had less than ten pounds on him, and that frustrated muggers usually make up the difference between their expectations and their acquisitions with bare-knuckle beatings and loose teeth.

It was a summer evening, and quite warm, but the estate had a chill all of its own. The block-shaped tiers of council flats cast odd shadows that slipped across alleyways in a manner that struck Greg as being subtly wrong, like an illustration where the perspective is off or the light sources contradictory. The graffiti wasn't the '80s hip-hop style he knew from his own area, elaborate signatures to absent works of art, but was bluntly, boldly blatant, embroidered only by the occasional swastika (invariably drawn the wrong way round), football club symbol or Union Jack scratch.

CHELSEA FC FOREVER. KILL THE COONS! NF NOW. GAS THE YIDS! UP THE GUNNERS. FUCK THE IRISH MURDERERS! HELP STAMP OUT AIDS — SHOOT A POOF TODAY. And the names of bands he had read about in Searchlight, the anti-fascist paper: SCREWDRIVER, BRITISH BOYS, WHITE-WASH, CRUSADERS. There was a song lyric, magic marked on a bus stop in neat primary school writing: "Jump down, turn around, kick a fucking nigger. Jump down, turn around, kick him in the head. Jump down, turn around, kick a fucking nigger. Jump down, turn around, kick him till he's dead..."

You would have thought that the Nazis had won the War, and installed a puppet Tory government. The estate could easily be a '30s science-fiction writer's idea of the ghetto of the future, clean-lined and featureless buildings trashed by the bubble-helmeted brownshirts of some interplanetary axis, Jews, blacks

and Martians despatched to some concentration camp asteroid. This wasn't the Jubilee Year. Nobody was even angry any more, just numbed with the endless, grinding misery of it all.

Eventually, more or less by wandering at random, he found Harry Lipman's flat. The bell button had been wrenched off, leaving a tuft of multi-coloured wires, and there was a reversed swastika carved into the door. Greg knocked, and a light went on in the hall. Harry admitted him into the neat, small flat, and Greg realized the place was fortified like a command bunker, a row of locks on the door, multiple catches on the reinforced glass windows, a burglar alarm fixed up on the wall between the gas and electricity meters. Otherwise, it was what he had expected: bookshelves everywhere, including the toilet, and a pleasantly musty clutter.

"I've not had many people here since Becky died" – Greg had known that Harry was a widower – "you must excuse the fearful mess."

Harry showed Greg through to the kitchen. There was an Amstrad PCW 8256 set up on the small vinyl-topped table, a stack of continuous paper in a tray on the floor feeding the printer. The room smelled slightly of fried food.

"I'm afraid this is where I write. It's the only room with enough natural light for me. Besides, I like to be near the kettle and the Earl Gray."

"Don't worry about it, Harry. You should see what my studio looks like. I think it used to be a coal cellar."

He put down his art folder, and Harry made a pot of tea.

"So, how's Dr Shade coming along? I've made some drawings."

"Swimmingly. I've done a month's worth of scripts, giving us our introductory serial. In the end, I went with the East End story as the strongest to bring the Doctor back..."

The East End story was an idea Harry and Greg had developed in which Dr Jonathan Chambers, miraculously not a day older than he was in 1952 (or in 1929, come to that) when he was last seen, returns from a spell in a Tibetan Monastery (or somewhere) studying the mystic healing arts (or something) to discover that the area where he used to make his home is being taken over by Dominic Dalmas, a sinister tycoon whose sharp-suited thugs are using violence and intimidation to evict the long-time residents, among whom are several of the doctor's old friends. Penelope Stamp, formerly a girl reporter but now a feisty old woman, is head of the Residents' Protection Committee, and she appeals to Chambers to resume his old crime-fighting alias and to investigate Dalmas. At first reluctant, Chambers is convinced by a botched assassination attempt to put on the cloak and goggles, and it emerges that Dalmas is the head of a mysterious secret society whose nefarious schemes would provide limitless future plotlines. Dalmas would be hoping to build up a substantial powerbase in London with the long-term intention of taking over the country, if not the world. Of course, Dr Shade would thwart his plots time and again, although not without a supreme effort.

"Maybe I'm just old, Greg," Harry said after he had shown him the scripts, "but this Dr Shade feels different. People said that when I took over from Donald,

the strip became more appealing, with more comedy and thrills than horror and violence, but I can't see much to laugh about in this story. It's almost as if someone were trying to force Dr Shade to be Donald's character, by creating a world where his monster vigilante makes more sense than my straight-arrow hero. Everything's turned around."

"Don't worry about it. Our Dr Shade is still fighting for justice. He's on the side of Penny Stamp, not Dominic Dalmas."

"What I want to know is whether he'll be on the side of Derek Leech?"

Greg really hadn't thought of that. The proprietor of the Argus would, of course, have the power of veto over the adventures of his cartoon character. He might not care for the direction Greg and Harry wanted to take Dr Shade in.

"Leech is on the side of money. We just have to make the strip so good it sells well, then it won't matter to him what it says."

"I hope you're right, Greg, I really do. More tea?"

Outside, it got dark, and they worked through the scripts, making minor changes. Beyond the kitchen windows, shadows crept across the tiny garden towards the flat, their fingers reaching slowly for the concrete and tile. There were many small noises in the night, and it would have been easy to mistake the soft hiss of an aerosol paintspray for the popping of a high-powered airgun.

**AUSSIE SOAP STAR GOT ME ON CRACK:** Doomed school-girl's story – EXCLUSIVE – begins in the *Comet* today.

**THE COMET LAW AND ORDER PULL-OUT:** We ask top coppers, MPs, criminals and ordinary people what's to be done about rising crime?

**BRIXTON YOBS SLASH WAR HERO PENSIONER:** Is the brix the only language they understand? "Have-a-Go" Tommy Barracough, 76, thinks so. A special *Comet* poll shows that so do 69% of you readers.

**DEREK LEECH TALKS STRAIGHT:** Today: IMMIGRATION, CRIME, UNEMPLOYMENT.

"No matter what the whingers and moaners say, the simple fact is that Britain is an island. We are a small country, and we only have room for the British. Everybody knows about the chronic housing shortage and the lack of jobs. The pro-open door partisans can't argue with the facts and figures."

"British citizenship is a privilege not a universal right. This simple man thinks we should start thinking twice before we give it away to any old Tom, Dick or Pandit who comes, turban in hand, to our country, hoping to make a fortune on the dole..."

**WIN! WIN! WIN! LURVERLY DOSH! THE COMET GIVE-AWAY GRID DISHES OUT THREE MILLION KNICKER! THEY SAID WE'D NEVER DO IT, BUT WE DID! MILLIONS MORE IN LURVERLY PRIZES MUST GO!**

This is BRANDI ALEXANDER, 17, and she'll be seen without the football scarf in our **ADULTS ONLY** Sunday edition. BRANDI has just left school. Already, she has landed a part in a film, *Fiona Does the Falklands*. The part may be small, but hers aren't...

**CATS TORTURED BY CURRYHOUSE KING?:** What's really in that vindaloo, Mr Patel?

**DID ELVIS DIE OF AIDS?:** Our psychic reveals the truth!

GUARDIAN ANGEL KILLINGS CONTINUE: Scotland Yard Insiders Condemn Vigilante Justice.

The bodies of Malcolm Williams, 19, and Barry Tozer, 22, were identified yesterday by the Reverend Kenneth Hood, a spokesman for the West Indian community. The dead men were dumped in an underpass on the South London Attlee Estate. Both were shot at close range with a small-bore gun, execution-style. Inspector Mark Davey of the Metropolitan Police believes that the weapon used might be an airgun. The incident follows the identical killings of five black and Asian youths in recent months.

Williams and Tozer, like the other victims, had extensive police records. Williams served three months in prison last year for breaking and entering, and Tozer had a history of mugging, statutory rape, petty thieving and violence. It is possible that they were killed shortly after committing an assault. A woman's handbag was found nearby, its contents scattered. Witnesses report that Williams and Tozer left The Flask, their local, when they couldn't pay for more drinks, and yet they had money on them when they were found.

The police are appealing for any witnesses to come forward. In particular, they would like to question the owner of the bag, who might well be able to identify the "Guardian Angel" executioner. Previous appeals have not produced any useful leads.

A local resident who wishes to remain anonymous told our reporter, "I hope they never catch the Guardian Angel. There are a lot more n\*gga b\*st\*ards with knives out there. I hope the Angel gets them all. Then maybe I can cash my pension at the post-office without fearing for my life."

Coming Soon: BRITAIN'S NEW-OLD NEWSPAPER. CHURCHILL'S FAVOURITE READING IS BACK. DR SHADE WILL RETURN. At last, the EVENING has a HERO.

— From the *Daily Comet*, Monday July the 1st, 1991

**S**aturday mornings were always quiet at comics conventions. Every time Greg went into the main hall there was a panel. All of them featured three quiet people nodding and chuckling while Neil Gaiman told all the jokes from his works-in-progress. He had heard them all in the bar the night before, and kept leaving for yet another turn around the dealers' room. They had him on a panel in the evening about reviving old characters: they were bringing back Tarzan, Grimly Feendish and Dan Dare, so Dr Shade

would be in good company. At the charity auction, his first attempts at designing a new-look Dr Shade had fetched over £50, which must mean something.

He drifted away from the cardboard boxes full of overpriced American comic books in plastic bags to the more eccentric stalls which offered old movie stills, general interest magazines from the '40s and '50s (and, he realized with a chill, the '60s and '70s), odd items like *Stingray* jigsaws (only three pieces missing, £12.00) and *Rawhide* boardgames (£5.00), and digest-sized pulp magazines.

A dealer recognized him, probably from an earlier con, and said he might have something that would interest him. He had the smugly discreet tone of a pimp. Bending down below his trestle table, which made him breathe hard, he reached for a tied bundle of pulps and brought them up.

"You don't see these very often..."

Greg looked at the cover of the topmost magazine, *Dr Shade Monthly*. The illustration, a faded Fitz-Gerald, showed the goggled and cloaked doctor struggling with an eight-foot neanderthal in the uniform of an SS officer, while the blonde Penny Stamp, dressed only in flimsy '40s foundation garments and chains, lay helpless on an operating table. INSIDE: "Master of the Mutants" a complete novel by REX CASH. Also "Flaming Torture," "The Laughter of Dr Shade" and "Hank the Yank and the Hangman of Heidelberg," April, 1945. A Badgerfield Publication.

Greg had asked Harry Lipman to come along to the con, but the writer had had a few bad experiences at events like this and said he didn't want to "mix with the looneys." He knew Harry didn't have many of the old mags with his stuff in, and that he had to buy these for him. Who knows, there might be a few ideas in them that could be re-used.

"Ten quid the lot?"

He handed over two fives, and took the bundle, checking the spines to see that the dealer hadn't slipped in some *Reader's Digests* to bulk out the package.



'Dr Shade and the Pharaoh's Curse' by Rex Cash (Donald Moncrieff) and Frank FitzGerald, Episode 27. *Evening Argus*, Thursday 29th July 1937

No, they were all Dr Shades, all from the '40s. He had an urge to sit down and read the lot.

Back in the hall, someone was lecturing an intently interested but pimple-plagued audience about adolescent angst in *The Teen Titans* and *X-Men*, and Greg wondered where he could get a cup of tea or coffee and a biscuit. Neil Gaiman, surrounded by acolytes, grinned at him and waved from across the room, signalling. Greg gestured his thanks. Neil had alerted him to the presence of Hunt Sealey, a British comics entrepreneur he had once taken to court over some financial irregularities. Greg did not want to go through that old argument again. Avoiding the spherical Sealey, he stepped into a darkened room where a handful of white-faced young men with thick glasses were watching a Mexican horror-wrestling movie on a projection video. The tape was a third- or fourth-generation dupe, and the picture looked as if it were being screened at a tropical drive-in during the monsoon.

"Come, Julio," said a deep American voice dubbed over the lip movements of a swarthy mad doctor, "help me carry the cadaver of the gorilla to the incinerator."

Nobody laughed. The video room smelled of stale cigarette smoke and spilled beer. The kids who couldn't afford a room in the hotel crashed out in here, undisturbed by the non-stop Z-movie festival. The only film Greg wanted to see — a French print of Georges Franju's *Les Yeux sans Visage* — was scheduled at the same time as his panel. Typical.

On the assumption that Sealey, who was known for the length of time he could hold a grudge, would be loitering in the hall harassing Neil, Greg sat on a chair and watched the movie. The mad doctor was transplanting gorilla hearts, and a monster was terrorizing the city, ripping the dresses off hefty senoritas. The heroine was a sensitive lady wrestler who wanted to quit the ring because she had put her latest opponent in a coma.

Greg got bored with the autopsy footage and the jumpy images, and looked around to see if anyone he knew was there. The audience were gazing at the screen like communicants at mass, the video mirrored in their spectacles, providing starlike pinpoints in the darkness.

He had been drawing a lot of darkness recently, filling in the shadows around Dr Shade, only the white of his lower face and the highlights of his goggles showing in the night as he stalked Dominick Dallas through the mean streets of East London. His hand got tired after inking in the solid blacks of the strip. Occasionally, you saw Dr Chambers in the daytime, but 95% of the panels were night scenes.

There was a glitch on the videotape, and the film vanished for a few seconds, replaced by Nanette Newman waving a bottle of washing-up liquid. Nobody hooted or complained, and the mad doctor's gorilla-man came back in an instant. A tomato-like eyeball was fished out, gravyish blood coursing down the contorted face of a bad actor with a worse toupee. Stock music as old as talking pictures thundered on the soundtrack. If it weren't for the violence, this could easily have been made in the '30s, when Donald Moncrieff's Dr Shade was in the hero business, tossing mad scientists out of tenth-storey windows and put-

ting explosive airgun darts into Bolsheviks and rebellious natives.

Although his eyes were used to the dark, Greg thought he wasn't seeing properly. A corner of the room, behind the video, was as thickly black as any of his panels. To one side of the screen, he could dimly see the walls with their movie posters and fan announcements, a fire extinguisher hung next to a notice. But the other side of the room was just an impenetrable night.

He had a headache, and there were dots in front of his eyes. He looked away from the dark corner, and back again. It didn't disappear. But it did seem to move, easing itself away from the wall and expanding towards him. A row of seats disappeared. The screen shone brighter, dingy colours becoming as vivid as a comic-book cover.

Greg clutched his Dr Shades, telling himself this was what came of too much beer, not enough food and too many late nights in the convention bar. Suddenly, it was very hot in the video room, as if the darkness were burning up, suffocating him...

A pair of spectacles glinted in the dark. There was someone inside the shadow, someone wearing thick sunglasses. No, not glasses. Goggles.

He stood up, knocking his chair over. Somebody grumbled at the noise. On the screen, the Mexico City cops had shot the gorilla man dead, and the mad doctor — his father — was being emotional about his loss.

The darkness took manshape, but not mansize. Its shadow head, topped by the shape of a widebrimmed hat, scraped the ceiling, its arms reached from wall to wall.

Only Greg took any notice. Everyone else was upset about the gorilla man and the mad doctor. Somewhere under the goggles, up near the light fixtures, a phantom white nose and chin were forming around the black gash of a humourless mouth.

Greg opened the door, and stepped out of the video room, his heart spasming in its cage. Slamming the door on the darkness, he pushed himself into the corridor, and collided with a tall, cloaked figure.

Suddenly angry, he was about to lash out verbally when he realized he knew who the man was. The recognition was like an ECT jolt.

He was standing in front of Dr Shade.

The Jew fled through the burning city, feeling a clench of dread each time a shadow fell over his heart. There was nowhere he could hide. Not in the underground railway stations that doubled as bomb shelters, not in the sewers with the other rats, not in the cells of the traitor police. The doctor was coming for him, coming to avenge the lies he had told, and there was nothing that could be done.

The all-clear had sounded, the drone of the planes was gone from the sky, and the streets were busy with firemen and panicking Londoners. Their homes were destroyed, their lilywhite lives ground into the mud. The Jew found it in his heart to laugh bitterly as he saw a mother in a nightdress, calling for her children outside the pile of smoking bricks that had been her house. His insidious kind had done their job too well, setting the Aryan races at each other's throats while they plotted with the Soviet Russians and the heathen Chinese to dominate the grim world that would come out of this struggle. Germans dropped bombs on Englishmen, and the Jew smiled.

But, in this moment, he knew that success of the Conspiracy would mean nothing to him. Not while the night still had shadows. Not while there was a Dr Shade...

He leaned, exhausted, against a soot-grimed wall. The

mark of Dr Shade was on him, a black handprint on his camelhair coat. The doctor's East End associates were dogging him, relaying messages back to their master, driving him away from the light, keeping him running through the night. There was no one to call him "friend."

A cloth-capped young man looked into the alley, ice-blue eyes penetrating the dark. He put his thumb and forefinger to his mouth and gave a shrill whistle.

"Ere, mateys, we gots us a Yid! Call for the doc!"

There was a stampede of heavy boots. Almost reluctant to keep on the move, wishing for it all to be over, the murdering filth shoved himself away from the wall and made a run for the end of the alley. The wall was low, and he hauled himself up it onto a sloping roof. The East End boys were after him, broken bottles and shivs in their hands, but he made it ahead of them. He strode over the tiles, feeling them shift under his feet. Some came loose and fell behind him, into the faces of Shade's men.

Using chimneys to steady himself, the stinking gutter-shite ran across the rooftops. He had his revolver out, and fired blindly into the darkness behind him, panic tearing him apart from the inside. Then, he came to the end of his run.

He stood calmly, arms folded, his cloak flapping in the breeze, silhouetted sharply against the fiery skyline. The thin lips formed a smile, and the child-raping libellous Israeltite scum knew he was justly dead.

"Hello, Harry," said Dr Shade.

— Donald Moncrieff, "Dr Shade, Jew Killer"  
(unpublished, 1942)

**H**ello, Harry," said Greg, jiggling the phone in the regulation hopeless attempt to improve a bad connection, "I thought we'd been cut off..."

Harry sounded as if he were in Jakarta, not three stops away on the District Line. "So there I was, face to goggles with Dr Shade."

He could make it sound funny now, hours later.

"The guy was on his way to the masquerade. There are always people in weird outfits at these things. He had all the details right, airgun and all."

Greg had called Harry from his hotel room to tell him about all the excitement the Return of Dr Shade was generating with the fans. Kids whose parents hadn't been born when the Argus went out of business were eagerly awaiting the comeback of the cloaked crimefighter.

"Obviously, the Doc has percolated into our folk memory, Harry. Or maybe Leech is right. It's just time to have him back."

His panel had gone well. The questions from the audience had almost all been directed at him, and he had had to field some to the other panelists so as not to hog the whole platform. The fans had been soliciting for information. Yes, Penny Stamp would be back, but she wouldn't be a girl reporter any more. Yes, the Doctor's Rolls Royce "Shadowshark" would be coming out of the garage, with more hidden tricks than ever. Yes, the Doctor would be dealing with the contemporary problems of East London. When someone asked if the proprietor of the paper would be exerting any influence over the content of the strip, Greg replied "well, he hasn't so far," and got cheers by claiming, "I don't think Dr Shade is a Comet reader, somehow." Somebody even knew enough to ask him to compare the Donald Moncrieff Rex Cash with the Harry Lipman Rex Cash. He had conveyed best wishes to the con from Harry, and praised the writer's still-active imagination.

At the other end of the line, Harry sounded tired. Sometimes, Greg had to remind himself how old the man was. He wondered whether the call had woken him up.

"We've even had some American interest, maybe in republishing the whole thing as a monthly book, staggered behind the newspaper series. I'm having Tamarra investigate. She thinks we can do it without tithing off too much of the money to Derek Leech, but rights deals are tricky. Also, Condé Nast, the corporate heirs of Street and Smith, have a long memory and still think Moncrieff ripped off The Shadow in the '30s. Still, it's worth going into."

Harry tried to sound enthusiastic.

"Are you okay, Harry?"

He said so, but somehow Greg didn't believe him. Greg checked his watch. He had agreed to meet Neil and a few other friends in the bar in ten minutes. He said goodnight to Harry, and hung up.

Wanting to change his panelist's jacket for a drinker's pullover, Greg delved through the suitcase perched on the regulation anonymous armchair. He found the jumper he needed, and transferred his convention badge from lapel to epaulette. Under the suitcase, he found the bundle of *Dr Shade Monthlies* he had bought for Harry. He hadn't mentioned them on the phone.

Harry couldn't have got back to bed yet. He'd barely be in the hall. Greg stabbed the REDIAL button, and listened to the clicking of the exchange. Harry's phone rang again.

The shadows in the room seemed longer. When Harry didn't pick up immediately, Greg's first thought was that something was wrong. He imagined coronaries, nasty falls, fainting spells, the infirmities of the aged. The telephone rang. Ten, twenty, thirty times.

Harry couldn't have got back to bed and fallen into a deep sleep in twenty seconds.

You also couldn't get a wrong number on a phone with a REDIAL facility.

The phone was picked up at the other end.

"Hello," said a female voice, young and hard, "who's this then?"

"Harry," Greg said. "Where's Harry?"

"E's got a bit of a problem, mate," the girl said. "But we'll see to 'im."

Greg was feeling very bad about this. The girl on the phone didn't sound like a concerned neighbour. "Is Harry ill?"

A pause. Greg imagined silent laughter. There was music in the background. Not Harry Lipman music, but tinny Heavy Metal, distorted by a cheap boombox and the telephone. Suddenly, Greg was down from his high, the good feeling and the alcohol washed out of his system.

"Hello?"

"Still here," the girl said.

"Is Harry ill?"

"Well, I'll put it this way," she said, "we've sent for the doctor."

Evidence has come to light linking Derek Leech, the man at the top of the pyramid, with a linked chain of dubious right-wing organizations here and abroad. A source inside the Leech organization, currently gearing up to launch a new national evening paper, revealed to our reporter, DUNCAN EYLES, that while other press barons diversify into

the electronic media and publishing. Derek Leech has his eye on a more direct manner of influencing the shape of the nation.

"Derek has been underwriting the election campaigns of parliamentary candidates in the last few by-elections," the source told us. "They mostly lost their deposits. Patrick Massingham, the Britain First chairman who later rejoined the Tories, was one. The idea was not to take a seat, but to use the campaigns to disseminate propaganda. The Comet has always been anti-immigration, pro-law-and-order, anti-anything-socialist, pro-hanging-and-flogging, pro-military spending, pro-political-censorship. But the campaigns were able to be rabidly so."

Leech, who has regularly dismissed similar allegations as "lunatic conspiracy theories," refused to comment on documents leaked to us which give facts and figures. In addition to funding Patrick Massingham and others of his political stripe, Leech has contributed heavily to such bizarre causes as the White Freedom Crusade, which channels funds from British and American big business into South Africa, the English Liberation Front, who claim that immigrants from the Indian Sub-Continent and the Caribbean constitute "an army of occupation" and should be driven out through armed struggle, the Revive Capital Punishment lobby, and even Caucasian supremacist thrash-metal band Whitewash, whose single "Blood, Iron and St George" was banned by the BBC and commercial radio stations but still managed to reach Number 5 in the independent charts.

Even more disturbing in the light of these allegations, is the paramilitary nature of the security force Leech is employing to guard the pyramid that is at the heart of his empire. Recruiting directly from right-wing youth gangs, often through advertisements placed in illiterate but suspiciously well produced and printed fanzines distributed at football matches, the Leech organization has been assembling what can only be described as an army of yobs to break the still-continuing print-union pickets in docklands. Our source informs us that the pyramid contains a well-stocked armoury, as if the proprietor of the Comet and the forthcoming Argus were expecting a siege. Rumour has it that Leech has even invested in a custom-made Rolls Royce featuring such unusual extras as bullet-proof bodywork, James Bond-style concealed rocket launchers, a teargas cannon and bonnet-mounted stilettos.

Derek Leech can afford all the toys he wants. But perhaps it's about time we started to get worried about the games he wants to play...

— Searchlight, August 1991.

**T**he minicab driver wouldn't take him onto the estate no matter what he offered to pay, and left him stranded at the kerb. At night, the place was even less inviting than by day. There were wire-mesh protected lights embedded in concrete walls every so often, but skilled vandals had got through to them. Greg knew that dashing into the dark maze would do no good, and forced himself to study the battered, graffiti-covered map of the estate that stood by the road. He found Harry's house on the map easily. By it, someone had drawn a stickman hanging from a gallows. It was impossible to read a real resemblance into the infant's scrawl of a face, but Greg knew it was supposed to represent Harry.

He walked towards the house, so concerned for Harry Lipman that he forgot to be scared for himself. That was a mistake.

They came from an underpass, and surrounded him. He got an impression of Union Jack T-shirts and shaven heads. Studded leather straps wrapped around knuckles. They only seemed to hit him four or five times, but it was enough.

He turned his head with the first blow, and felt his

nose flatten into his cheek. Blood was seeping out of his instantly swollen nostrils, and he was cut inside his mouth. He shook his head, trying to dislodge the pain. They stood back, and watched him yelp blood onto his chest. He was still wearing his convention tag.

Then one of them came in close, breathed foully in his face, and put a knee into his groin. He sagged, crying out, and felt his knees going. They kicked his legs, and he was on the ground. His ribs hurt.

"Come on, P," one of them said, "'e's 'ad 'is. Let's scarper."

"Nahh," said a girl — the one he had talked to on the telephone? — as she stepped forwards. "'e's not properly done yet."

Greg pressed his nostrils together to stanch the blood, and realized his nose wasn't broken. There was a lump rising on his cheek, though. He looked into the girl's face.

She was young, maybe fifteen or sixteen, and there was blonde fur on her skull. Her head was lumpy, and the skinhead cut made her child's face seem small, as if painted on an Easter egg. He had seen her the last time he was here. She wore Britannia earrings, and had a rare right-way-round swastika tattooed in blue on her temple.

"Come on..."

P smiled at him, and licked her lips like a cat. "Do you need telling any more, Mr Artist?"

The others were bunched behind her. She was small and wiry, but they were like hulks in the shadows.

"Do you get the picture?"

Greg nodded. Anything, just so long as they let him alone. He had to get to Harry.

"Good. Draw well, 'cause we'll be watching over you."

Lights came on in a house opposite, and he got a clearer look at their faces. Apart from P, they weren't kids. They were in the full skinhead gear, but on them it looked like a disguise. There were muffled voices from the house, and the lights went off again.

"Kick 'im, Penelope," said someone.

P smiled again. "Nahh, Bazzo. 'e knows what's what, now. We don't want to hurt 'im. 'e's important. Ain't ya, Mr Artist?"

Greg was standing up again. There was nothing broken inside his head, but he was still jarred. His teeth hurt, and he spat out a mouthful of blood.

"Dirty beast."

His vision was wobbling. P was double-exposed, a bubble fringe shimmering around her outline.

"Goodnight," said P. "Be good."

Then they were gone, leaving only shadows behind them. Greg ran across the walkway, vinegar-stained pages of the Comet swirling about his ankles. Harry's front door was hanging open, the chain broken, and the hallway was lit up.

Greg found him in his kitchen, lying on the floor, his word processor slowly pouring a long manuscript onto him. The machine rasped as it printed out.

He helped Harry sit up, and got him a teacup of water from the tap. They hadn't hurt him too badly, although there was a bruise on his forehead. Harry was badly shaken. Greg had never seen him without his teeth in, and he was drooling like a baby, unconsciously wiping his mouth on his cardigan sleeve. He



# DR SHADE

By REX CASH

JUSTICE IS DONE!!!  
ADMIT IT THE ALLEGATION IS TRUE.  
THE GREAT BRITISH  
ARCHAEOLOGISTS HAS BEEN SIEZED  
BY HIS NEMESIS, DR SHADE.



'Dr Shade and the Pharaoh's Curse' by Rex Cash (Donald Moncrieff) and Frank Fitzgerald, Episode 28. *Evening Argus*, Friday 29th July 1937

was trying to talk, but couldn't get the words out.

The phone was ripped out of the wall. The printer was scratching Greg's nerves. He sat at the desk, and tried to work out how to shut it off without losing anything. He wasn't familiar with this model.

Then, he looked at the continuous paper. It was printing out a draft of the first month of new Dr Shade scripts. Greg couldn't help but read what was coming out of the machine.

It wasn't what he had been working on. It wasn't even in script form. But Harry had written it, and he would be expected to draw it.

Unable to control his shaking, Greg read on.

"I'm sorry," said Harry. "It was Him. They brought Him here. He was here before Donald started writing Him. He'll always be here."

Greg turned to look at the old man. Harry was standing over him, laying a hand on his shoulder. Greg shook his head, and Harry sadly nodded.

"It's true. We've always known, really."

Beyond Harry was his hallway. Beyond that, the open door allowed Greg to see into the night. The shadowman was out there, laughing...

...the laughter faded into the noise of the printer.

Greg read on.

He thought for a moment before selecting the face he would wear tonight. The Chambers identity was wearing thin, limiting him too much. These were troubled times, and stricter methods were required. He considered all the people he had been, listed the names, paged through their faces.

Sitting behind the desk at the tip of the glass and steel pyramid, he felt the thrill of power. Out there in the night covered the Crack dealers and the anarchists, the blacks and the yellows, the traitors and the slackers. Tonight they would know he was back.

The press baron was a useful face. It had helped him gain a purchase on these new times, giving him a perspective on the sorry state of the nation.

He thought of the true patriots who had been rejected. Oswald Mosley, Unity Mitford, William Joyce, Donald Moncrieff. And the false creatures who had succeeded them. This time, things would be different. There would be no bowing to foreign interests.

He fastened his cloak at his throat, and peeled off the latest mask. Smiling at the thin-lipped reflection in the dark mirror of the glass, he pulled on the goggles.

The private lift was ready to take him to the Shadowshark. He holstered his trusty airgun.

Plunging towards his destiny, he exulted in the thrill of the chase. He was back.

Accept no pale imitations. Avoid the lesser men, the men of wavering resolves, of dangerous weaknesses.

He was the original.

— Rex Cash, "The Return of Dr Shade" (1991)

**G**reg was at his easel, drawing. There was nothing else he could do. No matter how much he hated the commission, he had to splash the black ink, had to fill out the sketches. It was all he had left of himself. In the panel, Dr Shade was breaking up a meeting of the conspirators. African communists were infiltrating London, foully plotting to sabotage British business by blowing up the Stock Exchange. But the Doctor would stop them. Greg filled in the thick lips of Papa Dominick, the voodoo commissar, and tried to get the fear in the villain's eyes as the shadowman raised his airgun.

"Did you hear," P said, "they're giving me a chance to write for the Argus. The Stamp of Truth, they'll call my column. I can write about music or politics or fashion or anything. I'll be a proper little girl reporter."

Crosbie told him Derek Leech was delighted at the way the strip was going. Dr Shade was really taking off. There were Dr Shade graffiti all over town, and he had started seeing youths with Dr Shade goggles tattooed around their eyes. A comics reviewer who had acclaimed Fat Chance as a masterpiece described the strip as "racist drivel." He hadn't been invited to any conventions recently, and a lot of his old friends would cross the street to avoid him. Greg's telephone rang rarely, now. It was always Crosbie. To his surprise, Tamara had cut herself out of the 10% after the first week of the Argus and told him to find other representation. He never heard from Harry, just

received the scripts by special messenger. Greg could imagine the writer disconsolately tapping out stories in Donald Moncrieff's style at his Amstrad. He knew exactly how the other man felt.

He had the radio on. The riots were still flaring up. The police were concerned by a rash of airgun killings, but didn't seem to be doing much about them. It appeared that the victims were mainly rabble-rousing ringleaders, although not a few West Indian and Asian community figures had been killed or wounded. Kenneth Hood, a popular vicar, had tried to calm down the rioters and been shot in the head. He wasn't expected to live, and two policemen plus seven "rioters" had died in the violent outburst that followed the attempt on his life. Greg imagined the shadowman on the rooftops, taking aim, hat pulled low, cloak streaming like demon wings.

Greg drew the Shadowshark, sliding through the city night, hurling aside the petrol-bomb-throwing minions of Papa Dominick. "The sun has shone for too long on the open schemes of the traitors," Harry had written, "but night must fall... and with the night comes Shade."

Early on, Greg had tried to leave the city, but they were waiting for him at the station. The girl called P, and some of the others. They had escorted him home. They called themselves Shadeheads now, and wore hats and cloaks like the doctor, tattered black over torn T-shirts, drainpipe jeans and steel-toed Doc Martens.

P was with him most of the time now. At first, she had just been in the corner of his vision, watching over him. Finally, he'd given in and called her over. Now, she was in the flat, making her calls to the Doctor, preparing his meals, warming his single bed. They'd pushed him enough, and now he had to be reassured, cajoled. He worked better that way.

Derek Leech was on the radio now, defending the record of his security staff during the riots. He had pitched in to help the police, using his news helicopters to direct the action, and sending his people into the fighting like troops. The police were obviously not happy, but public opinion was forcing them to accept the tycoon's assistance. Leech made a remark about "the spirit of Dr Shade," and Greg's hand jumped, squirting ink across the paper.

"Careful, careful," said P, dipping in with a tissue and delicately wiping away the blot, saving the artwork. Her hair was growing out. She'd never be a Comet Knock-Out, but she was turning into a surprisingly housewifely, almost maternal, girl. In the end, Shadeheads believed a woman's place was with her legs spread and her hands in dishwater.

In the final panel, Dr Shade was standing over his vanquished enemies, holding up his fist in a defiant salute. White fire was reflected in his goggles.

The news was over, and the new Crusaders single came on. "There'll Always Be an England." It was climbing the charts.

Greg looked out of the window. He imagined fires on the horizon.

He took a finer pen, and bent to do some detail work on the strip. He wished he had held out longer. He wished he'd taken more than one beating. Sometimes, he told himself he was doing it for Harry, to protect the old man. But that was bullshit. They hadn't been

Reggie Barton and Hank Hemingway. Imaginative torture hadn't been necessary, and they hadn't sworn never to give in, never to break down, never to knuckle under. A few plain old thumps and the promise of a few more had been enough. Plus more money a month than either of them had earned in any given three years of their career.

Next week, the Doctor would execute Papa Dominick. Then, he would do something about the strikers, the scroungers, the slackers, the scum...

A shadow fell over the easel, cloak spreading around it. Greg turned to look up at the goggled face of his true master.

Dr Shade was pleased with him.

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**Kim Newman** is rapidly becoming a Phenomenon of Our Time. Born in London in 1959, he grew up in the West Country, graduated from Sussex University and became a freelance writer almost immediately, specializing mainly in film criticism. His first short story appeared in *Interzone* in 1984, and since then we have published half a dozen more. His books include *Nightmare Movies* (1988) and the similarly-titled novel *The Night Mayor* (1989). In the past year, he has written no less than four "Warhammer" and "Dark Future" novels for GW Books, with more promised (plus a stream of novellas such as "Ignorant Armies," "Red Thirst" and "Route 666" – all these under the pseudonym of Jack Yeovil). He has just completed another non-fiction work, *Wild West Movies* (coming from Bloomsbury), and a horror novel, *Bad Dreams* (due from Simon & Schuster). Work on his long-promised big novel, *Jago*, is proceeding apace. On top of all that, he has a weekly Channel Four TV slot, and recently returned from a trip to Hollywood – where his brief was to explore the influence of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* on contemporary filmmakers, for a documentary in the "Signals" series.

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# Kim Newman

## Interview by Roz Kaveney

The short story "Famous Monsters" (Interzone 23) is typical Kim Newman, an outrageous movie interview from a world where *The War of the Worlds* happened, and a subsequent wave of immigration brought its tentacled subject as a bit player to Hollywood. It is not just the detailed elaboration of a filmography that echoes the interaction between movies and the real world we know; it is the sense of business as usual and of how things remain the same no matter what changes. What makes both possible is the controlling intelligent use of material, both material directly his own and material in which he bounces witty echoes off other work.

His first book, a study of horror films, appeared (in an imperfect form) as long ago as 1984. Newman explains: "I had the idea for *Nightmare Movies* soon after I started selling film criticism, and had the misfortune to have the book accepted by the first publisher I sent a chapter and outline to – whereupon they stalled for nearly two years and went bankrupt, owing me money, three weeks after finally getting the book out. During that period I was commissioned to write a series of movie books which were all completed and have never appeared. I'm not that bothered about the 'films of' books I did about Dustin Hoffman, Al Pacino and Marilyn Monroe (none of whom I am particularly interested in) but I would like, at some point, to resurrect the two sf-themed film books I did then – a study of Steven Spielberg and George Lucas, and *Atomic Cinema*, about Nuclear War films – and a flippan little trivia/diary book I put together at the same time."

Before all that, Newman wrote a number of plays for a small West-country theatre group, Sheep Worrying. Each of the plays he wrote was designed to be comparatively foolproof in that he wrote a small part for himself in each of them which could carry the plot if anything went wrong with the other performances. Most of these plays have contributed elements to subsequent fiction – for example, *Drachenfels* (1989, as by "Jack Yeovil"), his sword-and-sorcery novel for Games Workshop, draws on the backstage musical pastiche, Gold-

Diggers of 1981, that he wrote during this period as well as echoing in the seemingly incongruous context of a confrontation between corrupt crusaders for good and monstrous servants of chaos, just about every movie in which understudies have to go on to the stage and come back as a star.

What he learned from writing plays was a delight in structure and the games that you can play around it. For example *Drachenfels*, which deals with the commissioning and performance of a play supposed to celebrate the slaying of a monstrous mage, but actually to provide a suitable backdrop to his vengeful resurrection, is itself a five-act play, in which characters have their exits and their entrances and almost of all of them get at least one big scene.

The other thing about *Drachenfels* is that it takes the potentially crass hack formula of the games-oriented fantasy novel and, sticking within the rules, writes something that it is possible to take seriously. Often as not, it is the potentially self-indulgent references to movies that do the job of making us care. As the resurrected Drachenfels,

in a new body composed of bits of those who killed him the first time, menaces the last of them, the vampire Genevieve, he is interrupted by the director and playwright, Detlef Sierck, who has become the book's vain and shifty hero. (Like most of the names in the book, Sierck's was picked out of a classic period German filmography.) Asked who it is that stands in Drachenfels's way, Sierck answers "Detlef Sierck, genius"; a good line, and if the reader happens to remember that "Wile E. Coyote, genius" is what the coyote has on his cards in the Roadrunner cartoons, so much the better.

A paragraph or so later, an aristocrat in the audience tosses him a sword with the cry "Use it well, playactor"; we do not have to remember precisely which version of *The Prisoner of Zenda* that comes from to be cheered up at a moment of imminent catastrophe. Newman has said that these are not private jokes, but rather public thefts, but he steals little that he does not make his own in the process. There is a fine line between amusing those whom such jokes make feel welcome and annoying those who feel left out; Newman walks it successfully.

Since his first short piece, "Dreamers" (IZ 8), Newman has written about a dozen stories, but he has yet to appear in an American magazine. He explains: "My first short story to see print got published in *Interzone*. It was my fourth submission there. For the record, my first was the novella that became *The Night Mayor*, and the other two have since been sold to *Fantasy Tales* ('The Terminus') and *The Gate* ('D & D' – if it ever appears). I've never been prolific enough a short-story writer to submit to US markets, since my one or two pieces a year get snapped up by IZ, *Fantasy Tales* (who have two stories of mine forthcoming, 'The Man Who Collected Barker' and 'Mother Hen,' both featuring the private-eye character that 'Gargantuabots vs the Nice Mice' (IZ 33)), *Fear* or original anthologies. I was asked to submit a story to the US publication *Semiotext(e)* back in 1986 and wrote 'Pamela's Pursuit' for them, but they never got back to me (it's not in the book, which has just now appeared) and so I sold it to Alex Stewart for





**Arrows of Eros.** If I ever start turning stories out at an increased rate, I will probably start collecting rejection slips from Asimov's, *F&SF*, the *Sacramento Bee*, etc."

**T**he *Night Mayor* (1989), his first published non-pseudonymous novel, is set up so as to explore the game of movie echoes to the full, being a variant of the old sf idea of driving someone out of their dreams by imaginative force, which uses the film noir as a landscape of the mind in which constant menace becomes the air we breathe. It is his homage to the film noir in general and to Cornell Woolrich in particular; it is also a novel where the dissonances between its near future context and its 40s setting enable him to signal without preaching his complex dissents from the sexist and racist values of the films he loves.

For the most part, the sf elements are there purely to set up the ideas Newman wants to play with; he is not very interested in writing science fiction for its own sake. Again it was a novel written from knowledge rather than from research; and that knowledge was made the servant, not the master, of the jokes — the hero is anachronisti-

cally offered Raymond Burr as a defence lawyer. Having worked in theatre got him interested in unity of space because of the problems of shifting scenery; one of the joys of writing novels is that one can shift location as often as one likes. *The Night Mayor* is a book about film that is written in such a way that it cannot be filmed.

Like *The Night Mayor*, the "Dark Future" novels he is writing under the Jack Yeovil pseudonym, over the next year for Games Workshop are a complex blend of science fiction and horror elements. They are set in the future of an alternate world in which Nixon won the 1960 election, much of America has turned into a desert and Lovecraftian Old Gods are on the brink of bursting through, with only the Vatican, Elvis Presley, juvenile delinquents and the US Cavalry to stop them. The usual Newman games with genre mixing are in evidence here; so that *Demolition Download* is a Fort Apache style western, *Krokodil Tears* an example of that sort of martial arts movie in which the heroine gets progressively stronger and beats up bigger villains, and *Comeback Tour* (which Newman would have preferred to call *The Sky Belongs to the Stars*) is an Elvis Presley vehicle in which the age-

ing bounty hunter the King became in this world rediscovers the magical power of his music.

In the projected last volume, *United States Calvary*, Newman and his collaborator on that book, Eugene Byrne, face the daunting task of tying together neatly all the loose ends which proliferate as they write the intervening volumes. (All being well, Byrne's solo contribution to the series, *Violent Tendency*, should be out first — under the pseudonym "Myles Burnham.") Some ideas are interesting enough for the three weeks it takes Newman to write a Jack Yeovil novel, but would not be if he had to live with them for the six months and more it takes him to write a Kim Newman novel. He enjoys collaboration; it involves the constant bouncing around of ideas and less actual work. And of course there is a sense in which all genre work, playing as it does with echoes of other's ideas, is a collaboration...

Newman is by no means dismissive of these Warhammer and Dark Future books, despite his use of an unlikely-sounding pen-name. He says: "I took the Games Workshop commissions for the money, but then again I do this for a living so all my writing is for the money. It seemed to me that the format I was being asked to write to was loose enough for me to amuse myself and, with luck, turn out decent work. As it has turned out, I am quite pleased with Jack Yeovil's output so far. I decided to use a pseudonym on the books to differentiate between the sort of thing Kim Newman does and the sort of thing Jack Yeovil does. I always intended for it to be an open secret, much in the way that everyone knows Evan Hunter and Ed McBain, or Ruth Rendell and Barbara Vine, or Donald Westlake and Richard Stark are the same people doing different sorts of books. Jack may even do work outside the GW banner if anyone is interested. I have a book called *Bloody Students*, which is in the Harry Adam Knight vein, that would probably make a Yeovil title."

**H**e likes genre as play, but hopes he is not limited by it. The two forthcoming Kim Newman novels, *Bad Dreams* (1990) and *Jago* (1991) are essentially horror stories, but vary the formulae as much as the Yeovil novels transfigure those of games fiction. *Bad Dreams* is a combination of woman-in-jeopardy plot, vampire novel and celebration of London by night as a city of magical danger; it was originally a movie outline, which is one of the reasons it has such a strong heroine, and is almost all of the reason why she is an American. Finding a reason for her to be American, but living in London, brought Newman the whole House Committee on UnAmerican Activities subplot, and a way for the

vampire to have destroyed the heroine's father long before he really pissed her off by snacking on her sister. This is the novel in which he pays homage to Clive Barker, with scenes of vacated bodies hanging in what might be wardrobes or might be meat lockers; it also contains a set of variations on an imaginary classic American theatrical drama which demonstrates once and for all that one can play all sorts of post-modernist games and still be incredibly scary.

His characters always develop along curves – things get better before they get worse, and people get stronger by understanding weakness; conflict comes at the points where different characters' developments conflict, and he plots by explaining to himself how and why the characters do what they do. He enjoys fine distinctions; he enjoys his more monstrous characters, but also is fascinated by those characters who do not abuse their power, like Genevieve in *Drachenfels*, who is a vampire, but not a predator.

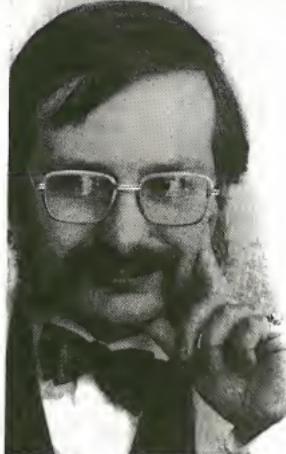
*Jago*, which should be ready in a year's time, carries to a number of limits the standard Newman terror of having your mind messed with from the outside. It contains a variety of apocalypses, varying from an outbreak of late-19th-century millenarianism based on an actual case in his home neighbourhood, to contemporary dreads about religious cults and government-sponsored telepaths. The hero is writing a thesis on late-19th-century Apocalypses, based on the one Newman wrote at Sussex. Newman's memories of the summer of the drought got associated with Wells' Martian War machines, and so they found their way in as well. *Jago* is Newman's Stephen King novel, in which he explores the effects of evil on a small community; accordingly, so that he knows it well, the village in *Jago* is the one where he grew up. The dynamics are the same, even when the people acting them out are different; resentment of shifting patterns of employment and the growth of retirement homes are as potent a factor as mind control. He does not mind using the conventions and clichés – after all, crazy cults do buy up old dark houses and sooner or later you have to go into them, just as you have to go down mean streets.

The revised *Nightmare Movies* (1988), his definitive study of hor-

ror, slasher and spatter movies, was perhaps the most pleasurable of all his projects. It and his book on Westerns, due out shortly, are slow work, and harder than doing fiction. Newman enlarges on the subject of his copious work in progress: "I'm still dabbling in TV, having done some writing and reporting work on this Signals programme about movie heroes, and keeping up with my weekly TV film-review slot on the Channel Four Daily. If there's a third series of *The Incredibly Strange Picture Show*, I might well work on it as a researcher/on-camera expert, although nothing is definite yet. As for non-fiction, I've just finished *Wild West Movies*, a book about Westerns, which will be out from Bloomsbury this Christmas, and am contemplating the editorship of *The British Film Institute Companion to Horror*, a huge volume which will

few Jack Yeovil ideas including 'Redd Square' (sanctioned operative Redd Harvest goes to Moscow), and a short sequel to *Moby Dick*. I've also been thinking of doing a follow-up to 'The Original Dr Shade' if I can work the idea out."

His next major project, once all the current ones have been finished, is a novel, *Something More than Night*, dealing with a monster rather like the one in *Bad Dreams*, but the book will be set in the 1900s and 1940s; this time he is going to have to do some research. When he read *Dracula* for the first time, it was the precise details he loved, all the railway timetables and Bowie knives. *Dracula* is a summary of all the modes of villainy known at the end of the 19th century; and, if you are going to work with villains and monsters, you have always got to go back to it.



demand a lot of work. As for novels, the Dark Future cycle is well advanced at the moment, and Eugene Byrne and I are in the planning stages on *United States Calvary*, which we hope will cap the whole series with a mini-apocalypse. *United States Calvary* and *Jago* have similar millenarian themes, so I'm obviously doing a lot of thinking about all that stuff just now. As for short stories, I'm working on 'In the Air' (with Eugene), a comic epic about a Stalinist America set in the 1950s, a

**Note:** Kim Newman's first three "Dark Future" novels, all under the name of Jack Yeovil, should be out as original B-format paperbacks from GW Books in May, June and July this year – that's *Demon Download*, *Krokodil Tears* and *Comeback Tour* (£4.99 each). The anthology *Route 666*, edited by David Pringle, also forms part of the series and contains a long title story by Kim.

Since the above interview, Kim has suddenly (that is, in the space of about three weeks) written a completely new and unheralded "Warhammer" fantasy novel. Entitled *Beasts in Velvet*, it's a murder-mystery story which reintroduces many of the characters from *Drachenfels* and the shorter stories "Ignorant Armies" and "Red Thirst." It's a delight, and it too should be available from GW Books later this year, under the trusty Jack Yeovil byline.

The anthology *Semiotext(e) SF*, mentioned in passing by Kim in the above piece, is edited by Rudy Rucker, Peter Lamborn Wilson and Robert Anton Wilson, and may be obtained from Semiotext(e), 522 Philosophy Hall, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, USA. It's priced at \$10 (plus \$6 p&p for persons outside the USA) and contains almost 400 pages of freaky fiction by Ballard, Bayley, Burroughs... and so on through to the end of the authors' alphabet.

# Eugene

## Greg Egan

**I** guarantee it. *I can make your child a genius.*" Sam Cook (MB BS MD FRACP PhD MBA) shifted his supremely confident gaze from Angela to Bill and then back again, as if daring them to contradict him.

Angela finally cleared her throat and said, "How?" Cook reached into a drawer and pulled out a small section of a human brain, sandwiched in perspex. "Do you know who this belonged to? I'll give you three guesses."

Bill suddenly felt very queasy. He didn't need three guesses, but he kept his mouth shut. Angela shook her head and said, impatiently, "I have no idea."

"Only the greatest scientific mind of the twentieth century."

Bill leant forward and asked, appalled but fascinated, "H-h-how did y-y-y-?"

"How did I get hold of it? Well, the enterprising fellow who did the autopsy, back in nineteen fifty-five, souvenired the brain prior to cremation. Naturally, he was bombarded with requests from various groups for pieces to study, so over the years it got subdivided and scattered around the world. At some point, the records listing who had what were mislaid, so most of it has effectively vanished, but several samples turn up for auction in Houston a few years ago – along with three Elvis Presley thigh bones; I think someone was liquidating their collection. Naturally, we here at Human Potential put in a bid for a prime slice of cortex. Half a million U.S. dollars – I can't remember what that came to per gramme – but worth every cent. Because we know the secret. Glial cells."

"G-g-g?"

"They provide a kind of structural matrix in which the neurons are embedded. They also perform several active functions which aren't yet fully understood, but it is known that the more glial cells there are per neuron, the more connections there are between the neurons. The more connections between neurons, the more complex and powerful the brain. Are you with me so far? Well, this tissue," he held up the sample, "has almost thirty per cent more glial cells per neuron than you'll find in the average cretin."

Bill's facial tic suddenly went out of control, and he turned away, making quiet sounds of distress. Angela glanced up at the row of framed qualifications on the wall, and noticed that several were from a private university on the Gold Coast which had gone bankrupt more than a decade before.

She was still just a little uneasy about putting her future child in this man's hands. The tour of Human

Potential's Melbourne headquarters had been impressive; from sperm bank to delivery room, the hardware had certainly gleamed, and surely anyone in charge of so many millions of dollars worth of supercomputers, X-ray crystallography gear, mass spectrometers, electron microscopes, and so on, had to know what he was doing. But her doubts had begun when Cook had shown them his pet project: three young dolphins whose DNA contained human gene grafts. ("We ate the failures," he had confided, with a sigh of gustatory bliss.) The aim had been to alter their brain physiology in such a way as to enable them to master human speech and "human modes of thought" – and although, strictly speaking, this had been achieved, Cook had been unable to explain to her why the creatures were only able to converse in limericks.

Angela regarded the grey silver sceptically. "How can you be sure it's as simple as that?"

"We've done experiments, of course. We located the gene that codes for a growth factor that determines the ratio of glial cells to neurons. We can control the extent to which this gene is switched on, and hence how much of the growth factor is synthesized, and hence what the ratio becomes. So far, we've tried reducing it by five per cent, and on average that causes a drop in IQ of twenty points. So, by simple linear extrapolation, if we up the ratio by two hundred per cent –"

Angela frowned. "You intentionally produced children with reduced intelligence?"

"Relax. Their parents wanted Olympic athletes. Those kids won't miss twenty points – in fact, it will probably help them cope with the training. Besides, we like to be balanced. We give with one hand and take with the other. It's only fair. And our bioethics Expert System said it was perfectly okay."

"What are you going to take from Eugene?"

Cook looked hurt. He did it well; his big brown eyes, as much as his professional success, had put his face on the glossy sleeves of a dozen magazines. "Angela. Your case is special. For you, and Bill – and Eugene – I'm going to break all the rules."

**W**hen Bill Cooper was ten years old, he saved up his pocket money for a month, and bought a lottery ticket. The first prize was fifty thousand dollars. When his mother found out – whatever he did, she always found out – she said calmly, "Do you know what gambling is? Gambling is a kind of tax: a tax on stupidity. A tax on greed. Some money changes hands at random, but the net cash flow always goes one way – to the government,

to the casino operators, to the bookies, to the crime syndicates. If you ever do win, you won't have won against them. They'll still be getting their share. You'll have won against all the penniless losers, that's all."

He hated her. She hadn't taken away the ticket, she hadn't punished him, she hadn't even forbidden him to do it again — she had simply stated her opinion. The only trouble was, as an ordinary ten-year-old child, he didn't understand half the phrases she'd used, and he didn't have a hope of properly assessing her argument, let alone rebutting it. By talking over his head, she might just as well have proclaimed with the voice of authority: *you are stupid and greedy and wrong* — and it frustrated him almost to tears that she'd achieved this effect while remaining so calm and reasonable.

The ticket didn't win him a cent, and he didn't buy another. By the time he left home, eight years later, and found employment as a data entry clerk in the Department of Social Security, the government lotteries had been all but superseded by a new scheme, in which participants marked numbers on a coupon in the hope that their choice would match the numbers on balls spat out by a machine.

Bill recognized the change as a cynical ploy, designed to suggest, *sotto voce*, to a statistically ignorant public that they now had the opportunity to use "skill" and "strategy" to improve their chances of winning. No longer would anyone be stuck with the immutable number on a lottery ticket; they were free to put crosses in boxes, any way they liked! This illusion of having control would bring in more players, and hence more revenue. And that sucked.

The TV ads for the game were the most crass and emetic things he'd ever seen, with grinning imbeciles going into fits of poorly acted euphoria as money cascaded down on them, cheerleaders waved pom-poms, and tacky special effects lit up the screen. Images of yachts, champagne, and chauffeur-driven limousines were intercut. It made him gag.

However. There was a third prong. The radio ads were less inane, offering appealing scenarios of revenge for the instantly wealthy: *Evict Your Landlord*. *Retrench Your Boss*. *Buy the Nightclub which Denied You Admission*. The play on stupidity and the play on greed had failed, but this touched a raw nerve. Bill knew he was being manipulated, but he couldn't deny that the prospect of spending the next forty-two years typing crap into a VDU (or doing whatever the changing technology demanded of shit-kickers — assuming he wasn't made completely obsolete) and paying most of his wages in rent, without even an infinitesimal chance of escape, was too much to bear.

So, in spite of everything, he caved in. Each week, he filled in a coupon, and paid the tax. Not a tax on greed, he decided. A tax on hope.

Angela operated a supermarket check-out, telling customers where to put their EFTPOS cards, and adjusting the orientation of cans and cartons if the scanner failed to locate their bar code (Hitachi made a device which could do this, but the U.S. Department of Defence was covertly buying them all, in the hope of keeping the Soviets from getting hold of the machine's pattern-recognition software). Bill always took his groceries to her check-out, however long the queue, and one day managed to overcome his patho-



Illustrations by Iain Byers

logical shyness long enough to ask her out.

Angela didn't mind his stutter, or any of his other problems. Sure, he was an emotional cripple, but he was passably handsome, superficially kind, and far too withdrawn to be either violent or demanding. Soon they were meeting regularly, to engage in messy but mildly pleasant acts, designed to be unlikely to transfer either human or viral genetic material between them.

However, no amount of latex could prevent their sexual intimacy from planting hooks deep in other parts of their brains. Neither had begun the relationship expecting it to endure, but as the months passed and nothing drove them apart, not only did their desire for each other fail to wane, but they grew accustomed to – even *fond* of – ever broader aspects of each other's appearance and behaviour.

Whether this bonding effect was purely random, or could be traced to formative experiences, or ultimately reflected a past advantage in the conjunction of some of their visibly expressed genes, is difficult to determine. Perhaps all three factors contributed to some degree. In any case, the knot of their interdependence grew, until marriage began to seem far simpler than disentanglement, and, once accepted, almost as natural as puberty or death. But if the offspring of previous Bill-and-Angela look-alikes had lived long and bred well, the issue now seemed purely theoretical; the couple's combined income hovered above the poverty line, and children were out of the question.

As the years passed, and the information revolution continued, their original jobs all but vanished, but they both somehow managed to cling to employment. Bill was replaced by an optical character reader, but was promoted to computer operator, which meant changing the toner on laser printers and coping with jammed stationery. Angela became a supervisor, which meant store detective; shop-lifting as such was impossible (supermarkets were now filled with card-operated vending machines) but her presence was meant to discourage vandalism and muggings (a real security guard would have cost more), and she assisted any customers unable to work out which buttons to push.

In contrast, their first contact with the biotechnology revolution was both voluntary and beneficial. Born pink – and more often made pinker than browner by sunlight – they both acquired deep black, slightly purplish skin; an artificial retrovirus inserted genes into their melanocytes which boosted the rate of melanin synthesis and transfer. This treatment, although fashionable, was of far more than cosmetic value; since the south polar ozone hole had expanded to cover most of the continent, Australia's skin cancer rates, already the world's highest, had quadrupled. Chemical sunscreens were messy and inefficient, and regular use had undesirable long-term side-effects. Nobody wanted to clothe themselves from wrist to ankle all year in a climate that was hot and growing hotter, and in any case it would have been culturally unacceptable to return to near-Victorian dress codes after two generations of maximal baring of skin. The small aesthetic shift, from valuing the deepest possible tan to accepting that people born fair-skinned could become black, was by far the easiest solution.

Of course, there was some controversy. Paranoid right-wing groups (who for decades had claimed that their racism was "logically" founded on cultural xenophobia rather than anything so trivial as skin colour) ranted about conspiracies and called the (non-communicable) virus "The Black Plague." A few politicians and journalists tried to find a way to exploit people's unease without appearing completely stupid – but failed, and eventually shut up. Neo-blacks started appearing on magazine sleeves, in soap operas, in advertisements (a source of bitter amusement for the Aboriginal people, who remained all but invisible in such places), and the trend accelerated. Those who lobbied for a ban didn't have a rational leg to stand on: nobody was being forced to be black – there was even a virus available which snipped out the genes, for people who changed their mind – and the country was being saved a fortune in health-care costs.

**O**ne day, Bill turned up at the supermarket in the middle of the morning. He looked so shaken that Angela was certain that he'd been sacked, or one of his parents had died, or he'd just been told that he had a fatal disease.

He had chosen his words in advance, and reeled them off almost without hesitation. "We forgot to watch the draw last night," he said. "We've won forty-seven m-m-m..."

Angela clocked out.

They took the obligatory world tour while a modest house was built. After disbursing a few hundred thousand to friends and relatives – Bill's parents refused to take a cent, but his siblings, and Angela's family, had no such qualms – they were still left with more than forty-five million. Buying all the consumer goods they honestly wanted couldn't begin to dent this sum, and neither had much interest in gold-plated Rolls Royces, private jets, Van Goghs, or diamonds. They could have lived in luxury on the earnings of ten million in the safest of investments, and it was indecision more than greed that kept them from promptly donating the difference to a worthy cause.

There was so much to be done in a world ravaged by political, ecological and climatic disasters. Which project most deserved their assistance? The proposed Himalayan hydroelectric scheme, which might keep Bangladesh from drowning in the floodplains of its Greenhouse-swollen rivers? Research on engineering hardier crops for poor soils in northern Africa? Buying back a small part of Brazil from multinational agribusiness, so food could be grown, not imported, and foreign debt curtailed? Fighting the still abysmal infant mortality rate amongst their own country's original inhabitants? Thirty-five million would have helped substantially with any of these endeavours, but Angela and Bill were so worried about making the right choice, that they put it off, month after month, year after year.

Meanwhile, free of financial restraints, they began trying to have a child. After two years without success, they finally sought medical advice, and were told that Angela was producing antibodies to Bill's sperm. This was no great problem; neither of them was intrinsically infertile, they could still both provide

gametes for IVF, and Angela could bear the child. The only question was, who would carry out the procedure? The only possible answer was, the best reproductive specialist money could buy.

Sam Cook was the best, or at least the best known. For the past twenty years, he'd been enabling women in infertile relationships to give birth to as many as seven children at a time, long after multiple embryo implants had ceased being necessary to ensure success (the media wouldn't bid for exclusive rights to anything less than quintuplets). He also had a reputation for quality control unequalled by any of his colleagues; after a stint in Tokyo on the Human Genome Project, he was as familiar with molecular biology as he was with gynaecology, obstetrics and embryology.

It was quality control that complicated the couple's plans. For their marriage licence, their blood had been sent to a run-of-the-mill pathologist, who had only screened them for such extreme conditions as muscular dystrophy, cystic fibrosis, Huntington's disease, and so on. Human Potential, equipped with all the latest probes, was a thousand times more thorough. It turned out that Bill carried genes which could make their child susceptible to clinical depression, and Angela carried genes which might make it hyperactive.

Cook spelt out the options for them.

One solution would be to use what was now referred to as TPGM: third party genetic material. No need to make do with any old dross, either; Human Potential had Nobel prize winner's sperm by the bucketful, and although they had no equivalent ova – collection being so much harder, and most prize winners being well into their sixties – they had blood samples instead, from which chromosomes could be extracted, artificially converted from diploid to haploid, and inserted into an ovum provided by Angela.

Alternatively – albeit at a somewhat higher cost – they could stick with their own gametes, and use gene therapy to correct the problems.

They talked it over for a couple of weeks, but the choice wasn't difficult. The legal status of children produced from TPGM was still a mess – and a slightly different mess in every state of Australia, not to mention from country to country – and of course they both wanted, if possible, a child who was biologically their own.

At their next appointment, while explaining these reasons, Angela also disclosed the magnitude of their wealth, so that Cook would feel no need to cut corners for the sake of economy. They had kept their win from becoming public knowledge, but it hardly seemed right to have any secrets from the man who was going to work this miracle for them.

Cook seemed to take the revelation in his stride, and congratulated them on their wise decision. But he added, apologetically, that in his ignorance of the size of their financial resources, he had probably misled them into a limited view of what he had to offer.

Since they'd chosen gene therapy, why be half-hearted about it? Why rescue their child from maladjustment, only to curse it with mediocrity – when so much more was possible? With their money, and Human Potential's facilities and expertise, a truly extraordinary child could be created: intelligent, creative, charismatic; the relevant genes had all been

more or less pinned down, and a timely injection of research funds – say, twenty or thirty million – would see the loose ends sorted out very rapidly.

Angela and Bill exchanged looks of incredulity. Thirty seconds earlier, they'd been talking about a normal, healthy baby. This grab for their money was so transparent that they could scarcely believe it.

Cook went on, apparently oblivious. Naturally, such a donation would be honoured by renaming the building's L.K. Robinson/Margaret Lee/Duneside Rotary Club laboratory the Angela and Bill Cooper/L.K. Robinson/Margaret Lee/Duneside Rotary Club laboratory, and a contract would ensure that their philanthropy be mentioned in all scientific papers and media releases which flowed from the work.

Angela broke into a coughing fit to keep from laughing. Bill stared at a spot on the carpet and bit his cheeks. Both found the prospect of joining the ranks of the city's obnoxious, self-promoting charity socialites about as enticing as the notion of eating their own excrement.

However. There was a third prong.

"The world," Cook said, suddenly stern and brooding, "is a mess." The couple nodded dumbly, still fighting back laughter – in full agreement, but wondering if they were now about to be told not to bother raising children at all. "Every ecosystem on the planet that hasn't been bulldozed is dying from pollution. The climate is changing faster than we can modify our infrastructure. Species are vanishing. People are starving. There have been more casualties of war in the last ten years than in the previous century." They nodded again, sober now, but still baffled by the abrupt change of subject.

"Scientists are doing all they can, but it's not enough. The same for politicians. Which is sad, but hardly surprising: these people are only a generation beyond the fools who got us into this mess. What child can be expected to avoid, to undo – to utterly transcend – the mistakes of its parents?"

He paused, then suddenly broke into a dazzling, almost beatific smile.

"What child? A very special child. Your child."

**T**he south polar ozone hole had also extended over South Africa, where of course the melanocyte treatment had been banned. Nevertheless, a resourceful post-graduate molecular biology student had smuggled in a sample of the virus, modified it to make it highly infectious, and released it all over Pretoria. Eventually, the "antidote" had been obtained, but not before thousands of government officials, from the President down, had been black for a fortnight. State-of-emergency censorship rules notwithstanding, pictures had been smuggled around the country, and beamed around the world.

It would be absurd to credit this incident with the regime's collapse five months later. There were a hundred other, better reasons why the time had come – including a prolonged national strike – and the stupidity of apartheid was hardly something that needed to be demonstrated, however elegantly the virus had done so.

Yet the undeniable symbolism of this coincidence had had a profound effect on the public perception of human genetic engineering. Opponents of molecular

eugenics had relied almost exclusively on pointing out similarities between modern trends and the obscenities of the past: nineteenth-century pseudosciences like phrenology and physiognomy, invented to support preconceptions about race and class differences; Nazi ideology about racial inferiority, which had led straight to the Holocaust; and late-twentieth-century radical biological determinism, a movement largely confined to the pages of academic journals, but infamous nonetheless for its attempts to make racism scientifically respectable. The Pretoria incident – justifiably or not – had effectively neutralized this racist taint, by suddenly making it more absurd than ever for anyone to claim that molecular biologists (as if they were all of one mind) were intent on creating a world of Aryan supermen (as if that, and precisely that, were the only conceivable abuse). Those who had played glibly on fears of the past were left without ammunition.

By the time Angela and Bill were contemplating Cook's proposal, the prevailing rhetoric was almost the reverse of that of a decade before. Modern eugenics was hailed by its practitioners as a force opposed to racist myths. Individual traits were what mattered, to be assessed "objectively" on their merits, and the historical conjuncions of traits which had once been referred to as "racial characteristics" were of no more interest to a modern eugenicist than national boundaries were to a geologist. Who could oppose reducing the incidence of crippling genetic diseases? Who could oppose decreasing the next generation's susceptibility to arteriosclerosis, breast cancer, and stroke, and increasing their ability to tolerate UV radiation, pollution and stress? Not to mention nuclear fall-out.

As for producing a child so brilliant as to cut a swathe through the world's environmental, political and social problems... perhaps such high expectations would not be fulfilled, but what could be wrong about trying?

And yet, Angela and Bill remained wary – and even felt vaguely guilty at the prospect of accepting Cook's proposal, without quite knowing why. Yes, eugenics was only for the rich, but that had been true of the leading edge of health care for centuries. Neither would have declined the latest surgical procedures or drugs simply because most people in the world could not afford them. Their patronage, they reasoned, could assist the long, slow process leading to extensive gene therapy for everyone's children. Well... at least everyone in the wealthiest countries' upper middle classes.

They returned to Human Potential. Cook gave them his VIP tour, he showed them his talking dolphins and his slice of prime cortex, and still they were unconvinced. So he gave them a questionnaire to fill out, a specification of the child they wanted; this might, he suggested, make it all a bit more tangible.

**C**ook glanced over the form, and frowned. "You haven't answered all the questions."

Bill said, "W-w-we didn't –"

Angela hushed him. "We want to leave some things to chance. Is that a problem?"

Cook shrugged. "Not technically. It just seems a pity. Some of the traits you've left blank could have

a very real influence on the course of Eugene's life."

"That's exactly why we left them blank. We don't want to dictate every tiny detail, we don't want to leave him with no room at all –"

Cook shook his head. "Angela, Angela! You're looking at this the wrong way. By refusing to make a decision, you're not giving Eugene personal freedom – you're taking it away! Abdicating responsibility won't give him the power to choose any of these things for himself; it simply means he'll be stuck with traits which may be less than ideal. Can we go through some of these unanswered questions?"

"Sure."

Bill said, "Maybe ch-ch-chance is p-part of freedom..." Cook ignored him.

"Height. Do you honestly not care at all about that? Both of you are well below average, so you must both be aware of the disadvantages. Don't you want better for Eugene?"

"Build. Let's be frank; you're overweight, Bill is rather scrawny. We can give Eugene a head start towards a socially optimal body. Of course, a lot will depend on his lifestyle, but we can influence his diet and exercise habits far more than you might think. He can be made to like and dislike certain foods, and we can arrange maximum susceptibility to endogenous opiates produced during exercise."

"Penis length –"

Angela scowled. "Now that's the most trivial –"

"You think so? A recent survey of two thousand male graduates of Harvard Business School found that penis length and IQ were equally good predictors of annual income."

"Facial bone structure. In the latest group-dynamic studies, it turned out that both the forehead and the cheekbones played significant roles in determining which individuals assumed dominant status. I'll give you a copy of the results."

"Sexual preference –"

"Surely he can –"

"Make up his own mind? That's wishful thinking, I'm afraid. The evidence is quite unambiguous: it's determined in the embryo by the interaction of several genes. Now, I have nothing at all against homosexuals, but the condition is hardly what you'd call a blessing. Oh, people can always reel off lists of famous homosexual geniuses, but that's a biased sample; of course we've only heard of the successes."

"Musical taste. As yet, we can only influence this crudely, but the social advantages should not be underestimated..."

**A**ngela and Bill sat in their living room with the TV on, although they weren't paying much attention to it. An interminable ad for the Department of Defence was showing, all rousing music and jet fighters in appealingly symmetrical formations. The latest privatization legislation meant that each taxpayer could specify the precise allocation of his or her income tax between government departments, who in turn were free to spend as much of their revenue as they wished on advertising aimed at attracting more funds. Defence was doing well. Social Security was laying off staff.

The latest meeting with Cook had done nothing to banish their sense of unease, but without solid reasons

to back up their feelings, they felt obliged to ignore them. Cook had solid reasons for everything, all based on the very latest research; how could they go to him and call the whole thing off, without at least a dozen impeccable arguments, each supported by a reference to some recent report in *Nature*?

They couldn't even pin down the source of their disquiet to their own satisfaction. Perhaps they were simply afraid of the fame that Eugene was destined to bring them. Perhaps they were jealous, already, of their son's as yet unknowable – but inevitably spectacular – achievements. Bill had a vague suspicion that the whole endeavour was somehow pulling the rug out from under an important part of what it had meant to be human – but he didn't know quite how to put it into words, not even to Angela. How could he confess that, personally, he didn't want to know the extent to which genes determined the fate of an individual? How could he declare that he'd rather stick with comfortable myths – no, forget the euphemisms, that he'd rather have downright lies – than have his nose rubbed in the dreary truth that a human being could be made to order, like a ham-burger?

Cook had assured them that they need have no worries about handling the young genius. He could arrange a queue-jumping enrolment in the best Californian baby university, where, amongst Nobel X Nobel TPGM prodigies, Eugene could do brain-stimulating baby gymnastics to the sound of Kant sung to Beethoven, and learn Grand Unified Field Theory subliminally during his afternoon naps. Eventually, of course, he would overtake both his genetically inferior peers and his merely brilliant instructors, but by then he ought to be able to direct his own education.

Bill put an arm around Angela, and wondered if Eugene really would do more for humanity than their millions could have achieved directly in Bangladesh or Ethiopia or Alice Springs. But could they face spending the rest of their lives wondering what miracles Eugene might have performed for their crippled planet? That would be unbearable. They'd pay the tax on hope.

Angela began loosening Bill's clothing. He did the same for her. Tonight – as they both knew, without exchanging a word – was the most fertile point of Angela's cycle; in spite of the antibodies, they hadn't abandoned the habits they'd acquired in the years when they'd been hoping to conceive naturally.

The rousing music from the television stopped, abruptly. The scenes of military hardware deteriorated into static. A sad-eyed boy, perhaps eight years old, appeared on the screen and said quietly, "Mother. Father. I owe you an explanation."

Behind the boy was nothing but an empty blue sky. Angela and Bill stared at the screen in silence, waiting in vain for a voice-over or title to put the image in context. Then the child's eyes met Angela's, and she knew that he could see her, and she knew who it must be. She gripped Bill's arm and whispered, dizzy with shock, but euphoric too, "It's Eugene."

The boy nodded.

For a moment, Bill was overcome with panic and confusion, but then sheer paternal pride swelled up and he managed to say, "You've invented t-t-t-time t-travel!"



Eugene shook his head. "No. Suppose you fed the genetic profile of an embryo into a computer, which then constructed a simulation of the appearance of the mature organism; no time travel is involved, and yet aspects of a possible future are revealed. In that example, all the machinery to perform the extrapolation exists in the present, but the same thing can happen if the right equipment – equipment of a far more sophisticated kind – exists in the potential future. It may be useful, as a mathematical formalism, to pretend that the potential future has a tangible reality and is influencing its past – just as in geometric optics, it's often convenient to pretend that reflections are real objects that exist behind the mirrors that create them – but a formalism is all it would be."

Angela said, "So because you might invent such a device, we can see you, and talk to you, as if you were speaking to us from the future?"

"Yes."

The couple exchanged glances. Here was an end to their doubts! Now they could find out exactly what Eugene would do for the world!

"If you were speaking to us from the future," Angela asked carefully, "what would you tell us? That you've reversed the Greenhouse Effect?" Eugene shook his head sadly. "That you've made war obsolete?" No. "That you've abolished hunger?" No. "That you've found a cure for cancer?" No. "What, then?"

"I would say that I have found the way to Nirvana."

"What do you mean? Immortality? Infinite bliss? Heaven on Earth?"

"No. Nirvana. The absence of all longing."

Bill was horrified. "Y-y-you d-don't mean g-g-genocide? You're n-not going to w-w-w-wipe –"

"No, father. That would be easy, but I would never do such a thing. Each must find their own way – and in any case, death is an incomplete solution, it cannot erase what has already been. Nirvana is to never have been."

Angela said, "I don't understand."

"My potential existence influences more than this television set. When you check your bank accounts, you will find that the money you might have used to create me has been disbursed; don't look so distressed – it's all gone to charitable organizations of which you both approve. The computer records are precisely as if you had authorized the payments yourselves, so don't bother trying to challenge their authenticity."

Angela was distraught. "But... why would you waste your talents on destroying yourself, when you could have lived a happy, productive life, and done great things for the whole human race?"

"Why?" Eugene frowned. "Don't ask me to account for my actions; you're the ones who would have made me what I would have been. If you want my subjective opinion: personally, I can't see any point in existence when I can achieve so much without it – but I wouldn't call that an 'explanation'; it's merely a rationalization of processes best described at a neural level." He shrugged apologetically. "The question really has no meaning. Why anything? The laws of physics, and the boundary conditions of space-time. What more can I say?"

He vanished from the screen. A soap opera appeared.

They contacted their bank's computer. The experience had been no shared hallucination; their accounts were empty.

They sold the house, which was far too large for just the two of them, but it cost them most of the proceeds to buy something smaller. Angela found work as a tour guide. Bill got a job on a garbage truck.

Cook's research continued without them, of course. He succeeded in creating four chimpanzees able to sing, and understand, country and western, for which he received both the Nobel Prize and a Grammy award. He made it into the Guinness Book of Records, for implanting and delivering the world's first third-generation IVF quins. But his super-baby project, and those of other eugenics around the world, seemed jinxed: sponsors backed out for no apparent reason, equipment malfunctioned, labs caught fire.

Cook died without ever understanding how completely successful he'd been.

---

Greg Egan, born in 1961, wrote "The Cutie" (IZ 29) and a couple of earlier stories for us. He has been working lately as a part-time programmer in a Perth hospital, but, with recent sales to Analog, Asimov's and Pulphouse as well as Interzone, he intends to take up full-time writing soon. The above is just the first of several fine new pieces we have upcoming from him. In particular, watch out for his devastating "Learning to Be Me," next issue.

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IZ 01

# Nunivak Snowflakes

## Alastair Reynolds

**S**eaplane days had always been special for Naluvara. Even now, troubled by love and adult doubt, seaplane days were special. Like many of his people, therefore, he found himself trudging out to the frozen shoreline, scanning the white sky for the growing orange speck of the aircraft.

It was rare, though, for the plane to arrive with anything interesting, unless you counted crates of SRA school books and videotapes, refrigerated medical supplies, greased machine parts, and, of course, fish – especially fish; trout and salmon, processed and irradiated at Point Barrow until they tasted deader than fossils.

The people of Nunivak made do with the imports. They still hunted walrus and seal, but not very successfully, and fresh fish was infrequent enough to count as a luxury. If a lot was caught it was customary to make some kind of offering to the “helping spirits,” the invisible tunraq. Many of the islanders still cherished such beliefs; Naluvara was one of them.

Anyway, seaplane days were exciting. The men would drag their flimsy boats into the frothy waters of the Bering Sea, then wait patiently for the seaplane to silence its two engines. The tannik men in the aircraft always had beards and sunglasses, their faces blanched by UV barrier cream, and they always handed small white boxes out the cockpit window, before unloading the main cargo from the side door. Naluvara was shrewd enough to detect a black market in cigarettes, which amused him richly. The tannik men themselves often smoked, yet their whole race was paranoid about picking up melanomas under the fringes of the ozone hole.

The boats were propelled by a makeshift combination of oars and loud, roughly tuned outboards. Outriggers made them almost impossible to capsize, despite being top-heavy on the return leg. Now and again a nervous passenger would come back with them, often a tannik doctor, but very occasionally a visitor from one of the other settlements, further north, further east. Today was such an occasion, which made the day doubly special. But for Naluvara its immediate significance lay elsewhere, for it was a day that the tunraq had chosen on which to communicate with him.

Earlier that morning a strange silvery fish had dropped in the snow outside his home. Past experience told him how to unlock the fish's message: taking care to avoid his mother, he scuttled indoors, first locking his bedroom door then placing the dead creature on a filched chopping board. Swift slashes of a flick knife

opened its red belly. Inside was the usual mode of tunraq communication, a rolled sheet of grey paper which his gloved fingers strove to flatten on the desk. He brushed aside the messed reams of school notes; physics and biology problems that required Tania's expert advice. None of that mundane stuff mattered for the moment. When the tunraq spirits spoke, he listened.

Nibbling the end of a plastic-wrapped salami stick, he pondered the utterance. As usual it was deadeningly simple.

### Avoid the Wind Farm today.

T

And that was it: the standard laconic message, neatly typed on the slightly soggy grey paper. This had been going on years; sometimes the messages were specific, sometimes not. Today's did not unduly worry him, nor was it the first to warn him clear of the generators north of the settlement. Perhaps one of the hungry Netsilik dogs was prowling there, maddened by rabies. Or a million other possibilities.

The customs of the Netsilik clan would ensure that this was a memorable time to visit the island, even if the newcomer was Inupiat. Nunivak Island was a smouldering intermix of previously isolated northern cultures, a UN-sanctioned melting pot. Times of celebration were eagerly shared – as were times of misery. As now, when a Netsilik family mourned the death of their grandmother. For five days they retreated into a workless stasis, a customary observation which reached the other families soon enough. Dogs went hungry. Hair went uncombed. Generators that broke down went unrepaired, so that clumps of gloom were slowly absorbing the community's autumnal lights.

This afternoon her two sons would drag her body away on the back of a skin sledge. Tonight they would leave her uncovered body under the stars and satellites, but her soul would long have departed for the beautiful Netsilik afterlife. Shortly Nunivak would celebrate its twentieth anniversary, but there would be fewer fireworks than usual.

**S**o who was this newcomer? Was she fully Inupiat, like Naluvara's family, or was she mixed Caucasian? She looked a little Chugach, one of the Amerindians from the warm south. It was hard to tell. She certainly lacked any of Naluvara's Mongoloid genes.

She wore spanking new snow gear in sky blue and canary yellow, and gripped a grey plastic case in woollen mitts. In vain, Naluvara hunted for a red cross

or some such symbol to signify her as a doctor or ecologist. He watched sullenly as her escort plodded toward the closest cluster of homes. In the far distance the propellers of the plane signalled its imminent departure. Skulking, he observed it climb into the air, banking south. He was skulking to avoid any of the day's tedious muck-in household chores, particularly those concerned with the imported fish. He was also scheming – plotting another's downfall.

Snow fluffed out of the pale sky. Some women heaved and tugged fresh gas canisters across the ground, ready to install them in the big community kitchen. Western music thudded out of a tumbledown shack half concealed behind a small knoll. An unlit neon sign, in wavy handwriting letters, proclaimed "Spike's" to be the name of the establishment.

Naluvara's friend Apik had been coming on too strongly with his beloved, Tania. In under a fortnight a passenger plane would carry her back to Anchorage to resume her University studies. That was bad enough, but worse still was that Naluvara had caught the pair of them giggling outside Spike's, in broad daylight, in public. Electing to take young Apik down a peg or two, Naluvara had embarked on a protracted period of psyching out. Now it was time for a showdown.

There were rules which governed the correct behaviour of an *ongogok*, an Innupiat shaman, and Naluvara was well aware that this broke most of them. But if the other islanders were so intent on not accepting him as a shaman, what did it matter? Screw the whole-lot of hypocritical fatheads. Only the helping spirits mattered.

Coldly fuming, he stalked toward his family home. But a gritty old voice stopped him in his tracks, booming across the settlement.

"Oi, Nalu!"

He grimaced. "What now, Ugrook?"

Which wasn't his name at all. The oldster was a relic from the bad days, deluded by Alzheimer's, utterly unreliable. Truth to tell, even Naluvara considered him a shade crazy, but he stopped at shunning the frail, white-haired hunter. Grinning, he revealed his excellent, false dentures. He walked with a vague stoop, but that stoop had once been much worse. He was as thin as a pipe-cleaner man.

"I hurt my poor hand!" bawled the hunter. Blood oozed out of a handkerchief bandage, leaving dilated pink irises in the fresh snow.

"Is that all?" asked Naluvara grumpily. "Oh, bring it to my room." At least he would have an excuse if he was pestered by his mother. She always turned a blind eye when he was... working.

Clad in shiny silver moon-boots, they both stomped past the hulking body of a snowcat, its innards cannibalized for generator parts – on past a quaint cluster of *Iglulik* huts, around a spidery totem pole adorned with a variety of satellite aerials, past an Innupiat woman feeding thin dogs, into the side of a shoe-box shaped prefab. Snow flicked up its corrugated sides.

**B**y now Naluvara had calmed down enough to offer the old man some grudging reassurance. "How did you do that, then?"

Indoors, they kicked powdery snow off their boots before it had a chance to melt. Naluvara ushered his

patient into a warm room smelling unharmoniously of percolated coffee and dissected fish, walls covered in monochrome French film posters.

The oldtimer slouched his brown cap. "Trying to fix my damn outboard," he muttered. "Wrapped rope around hand, without glove, pulled to start her... then I'm ending up bleeding all over the place." He waved dismissively with his healthy arm. "Achu... I am just being careless. Perhaps I broke the *Netsilik* taboo too soon, who knows?"

Naluvara nodded. He and the old man shared similar opinions about the sanctity of the old ways.

"Have you thought any more about what I said to you before?"

Naluvara nodded without much conviction. "Oh, sure. I sent for the prospectuses."

"That's a start."

Naluvara set the percolator gurgling, then slipped awkwardly out of his parka. Anyone who did not know him would have thought his motions strangely contorted, but Naluvara thought nothing of it. The clothes he wore underneath – corduroy jacket and thick woollen shirt – had come in on the seaplane last year, purchased out of his mother's *Wishing Book*, as she delighted in calling her catalogue. Like the old man, his mother was keen that he attend university, in a vague and unspecific way, just another of those tannik ideas she had never directly experienced. Neither she nor the hunter grasped the problems involved, least of all the old muddlehead – but he at least accepted Naluvara's skills as genuine magic.

"Sit down on my bunk," Naluvara said in doctory fashion. "This shouldn't take very long."

He darkened the room, then blindfolded the older. These theatrics were nothing compared to the antics of the old shamans, and Naluvara felt quite unselfconscious about them.

"You should be letting the tunraq move over to one of us old folk," the hunter said. "Not myself, mind you. But someone who can remain on Nuniavik."

"I can stay on the island."

"You should have your own life. You're young, you need a proper education. These aren't the old days. Young man, this is the jet age."

"Huh," scoffed Naluvara, remembering Tania. "Don't I know it. Now, old guy. I want you to shut up for a while."

He was silent. Naluvara began, as always, by rolling up his sleeve, until his right arm was bare to the elbow. In the dim half-light that filtered through the room's drawn curtains the arm looked almost real: in fact it was artificial, a powered dexterous prosthesis. It replaced the right arm that Naluvara had not been born with, the most recent in a long line of substitutes. It was via this particular hunk of plastic and metal and circuits that the helping spirits channelled their healing forces. They inhabited it. If he slipped it off he became acutely conscious of their absence.

"Here goes," Naluvara whispered. He examined the patient's injured hand, its exposed wound clearly deeper than first suspected. A bad rope burn? He doubted it. More likely the old man had been meddling with someone else's property, a fact he was now trying to conceal.

With concentration his vision sharpened, like a camera clicking into autofocus. Except... it was almost



like emerging from a bank of mist, into sun-drenched clarity. Or seeing, in a flash, the young woman rather than the hag in a trick picture.

He passed his hand over the wound, and saw the unbroken, brittle old bones. To Naluvara the veins, tendons and arteries stood out like river tributaries in an infrared satellite photograph. A wordless tsunami of knowledge flooded him, subsuming every conscious thought in a torrent of empathy. He felt inexplicable energies gushing through the hollow shell of his arm. The abstract realization that he was simply a conduit always hit him afresh, but it never mattered. The important thing was that he alone had been chosen.

A wispy aura flexed around his stiff fingers, the colour of a hot gas flame, shading into ultraviolet. An explosive pressure was mounting in his arm. Outside it was still snowing. From way across the community dogs were howling like banshees.

He touched the wound. The old man remained silent. Naluvara closed his own eyes. Many minutes passed before either of them relaxed. The sounds of quiet breathing and trickling coffee filled the warm room. Calmly Naluvara widened the curtains, clicking on the bulb.

"It's over," he announced. Superficially, the wound looked the same, although the bleeding had ceased. Both of them knew, though, that healing would be rapid, with no pain, scarring or stiffness.

"Your back still okay?"

"The slipped disc? Oh, she's fine. The doctors at Barrow, they just...pakk, meddle, worsen things." Thick and dark, the coffee gurgled out. They sat

and drank in silence, until the hunter piped up forgetfully: "So tell me. Have you sent for the prospectuses yet?"

Naluvara winced, and stared blankly out of the window. It was only then that he remembered his mission.

Apik must be taken down!

**W**aves of heat and waves of cold washed over the newcomer.

She sipped from a mug of frothy soup, cross-legged on a downright luxuriant flooring of bearskin. She was still shivering intermittently, despite the relative warmth of the house.

Artifacts of Eskimo culture cluttered the walls, only a few of which she could confidently identify. Worn mukluks were easy. Familiar knives and spears flanked a fishing rod, while a bag - deerskin? - hung in one corner. Pride of place went to a ragged but still impressive Caribou jacket, patterned in shades of ochre and mahogany. But the rest of the wallhangings seemed to be random knick-knacks of no discernible function - presumably pieced together from the several constituent cultures that had converged on Nuvivak.

Her grey case was opened like an oyster, half divulg-ing its innards. Every second a radar unit scanned around the case, hunting for intruders. Lilac neon striplights glowed in its lid, casting an electric shadow show around the room.

Next door the family talked. Their cheerful sounds permeated a thin veil of animal skin, hung from an aluminium curtain track. Pots clanged together. A little Eskimo girl - she corrected herself - a little Innupiat

girl, made raucous dive-bomber noises. Radio Wainwright came over on short wave, hazed by static.

They were good, simple people. Simple, not in the pejorative tannik sense, but in the sense of remaining unpolluted by the whole complex slew of modern anxieties. The last few decades had been catastrophic times of transition for most Inupiat, as the superpowers relentlessly probed into their personal heartlands. Past legacies touched them: global warming and enhanced UV levels forced people south, away from their traditional habitations. And, with communities dwindling, many sites teetered on the verge of the "extinction vortex," riddled by the telltale symptoms of inbreeding.

Nunivak and Barrow — Cultural Contingencies — were not a perfect answer, but at least they were an answer. In order to survive at all as Eskimo, it was conjectured, the people had to pool their bloodlines, merge their cultures. They had to fluidize. Now, at last, things were taking an up-turn. Something adaptable and quick-witted had sprung out of this fizzing meltdown process. As a people, the Inupiat were in excellent shape for the new century.

Recently, though...

Well, none of it was understood.

She finished drinking. Her chill had abated to the point where she could happily listen to the wind rattle the prefab's rickety walls with something bordering on a snug sense of safety. A long Arctic night was coming in, darker by the hour, by the day, by the week. Soon life on the island would fade into a kind of hibernation.

She passed her hand into the case's scanner. The snap-shut mechanism recognized her palm-print and refrained from viciously closing, allowing her to spill out a manilla envelope. She leafed through Canadian government paperwork until one sheet in particular was located.

Something was stapled to it: a rectangle of cellophane, encasing a smaller rectangle of metallic foil, the approximate size and shape of a razor-blade.

This piece of metal, and several like it, were currently the focus of a massively secret investigation mounted by the Canadians. It was a probe conducted right under the noses of the superpowers, with a fraction of their scientific and technical might. Each of the foils carried an identical message, encoded by the positions of impure ions fixed within the foil's metallic lattice.

The message was:

#### **Greetings from Nunivak**

— and what made the message significant — unimaginably significant — was the fact that it had been found in the gut of a dead fish. But that dead fish had been safely intombed in permafrost for thirteen thousand years.

**N**aluvara was stewing in his own juices when he caught sight of Tania, silhouetted in the window of the 7-11. He grabbed his parka, jammed on his boots, and was just fast enough to meet her emerging, drinking from an icily cold Fanta. They were immediately speechless, and all Naluvara could concentrate on was a purple-grey bruise of a cloud, like a reef breaking the surface of the sky's ocean. The snow had abated.

"They took out the old Netsilik lady," he eventually spluttered. "Tonight there'll be..."

"Oh yes," Tania said lowly. "About tonight...Nalu, I don't..."

"What?"

Awaiting her answer, which was a long time coming, Naluvara studied her face. Her father was a tannik ecologist, big blonde Norwegian named Lars Tollefson, who had arrived with his daughter ten years ago to study the effects of ozone depletion on Nunivak's flora. Her mother was already dead then, killed on a melting glacier. Naluvara's father died by ice, and this affinity brought them together; Inupiat and Westerner. Her Nordic looks and blonde hair made her a highly prized item among Nunivak's young males, subtly influenced by MTV's axioms of aestheticism, brought to them by the satellites.

"I won't be there," she admitted. "To be honest, it alarms me, all this nutty superstition. You can go, sure. Prance around in front of the old folk, do your apprentice shaman routine. But don't expect me to have anything to do with it."

He was riled. It wasn't just what she was saying, it was her stupid artificial American accent, lacquered over her previously flat mix of soft Alaskan inflections and Norwegian-tinged English, like a very tacky custom paint job. She'd only been at Anchorage for a year, for shit's sake. If that was what College did for you...

He kicked at the ground. Now was the time. "Tan, I want you to stay away from Apik, right?"

She looked at him incredulously. "Oh, what!"

"You heard."

"Jeez, I can't believe what I'm hearing! I mean, petty jealousy's one thing but this takes the biscuit!"

Naluvara looked around nervously. "Look, let's go somewhere and, um, talk."

"No."

"Why not?"

She glugged the Fanta without offering him any,

"I've got to go help pa. Besides..." She flashed her expensive and slender wristwatch, its numerals raised holographically. "I've just got to go. Enjoy."

Naluvara watched her go off calmly, thinking her a bitch. Then a new thought crystallized. She wasn't headed home at all; rather, she was taking a round-about route to Apik's. Right. It was time to get even. High time.

Naluvara did some mental arithmetic and decided that ten or fifteen minutes would give both of them enough time to get, well, cosy. He could then blaze in, justifiably angry. Apik wouldn't know what had hit him; having once been pals, Naluvara felt as sure of his friend's weaknesses as his own.

As he was plotting his next movements a fish thudded at his feet. He gazed skyward, into a blank basin of grey. The fish had fallen from thin air, just as they always did.

He opened it surreptitiously, keen not to attract attention with this frankly odd behaviour. Sure enough the fish divulged a note.

To his surprise it read:

**I said don't go near the Wind Farm!**

— Tania

**A** little while earlier the newcomer received news from her own people. A transmission was beamed into her case, from one of three Canadian Navy stealthsubs lurking in the Bering Sea. It was distressing news.

A Soviet aircraft carrier had just launched two helicopters for Nunivak, large enough to carry troops. And a USAF Hercules had overflowed Nunivak an hour earlier, disgorging two radar blips — parachutists — immediately over the community.

Her first thought was that she had been uncovered, and that the superpowers were coming to grind her into oblivion, a scapegoat for Canada's sheer impudence. Her government was not supposed to be operating anywhere near the Nunivak settlement, much less infiltrating it with a top counter-intelligence operative who just happened to be one quarter Chugach.

The Americans, though, were far too preoccupied with spying on the Soviets and the Chinese to have any really hard data on the activities of their supposedly compliant neighbour. Some other lure must have drawn them to Nunivak.

Sealing the case, she momentarily regretted being unarmed, although, if the worst came to the worst, she might easily find weapons in the Innupiat community. Would the Americans threaten her to learn more about the fish messages? Had they, in fact, already unearthed and decoded their own?

This was certainly a possibility, though given the facts it was hard to see what wasn't. Radiocarbon dating revealed that the fish really were as ancient as they seemed, somehow implanted in the permafrost thirteen thousand years ago. Whoever or whatever had done that had somehow known that the Canadians would come to test-bore along that exact level, in that precise direction, at a time when the message would be both comprehensible and accessible via their technology. No mean feat, really. But if one was to accept the fish as genuine... then someone was playing games with time.

In a way, the message resembled a calling card. Had the other powers also been invited? If that was the case the Canadians were as paupers at the king's supper. And the poor Eskimo?

They were lapdogs.

**O**nce down, they left their parachutes draped over the snow like corrugated silver skins shed by enormous insects. They operated with sterile precision, well aware that the other superpowers were looming on Nunivak's horizon. Laser-target Uzis hung from their belts, masses of dark equipment slung where a reserve chute would ordinarily have been. Their faces were ghastly and pale, apart from antiglare smudges under the eyes. These tannik, like all tannik, were terrified of the monstrous ozone hole which lay above them, like little mammals trapped in the fixating glare of an owl's eye.

One of the Americans carried a device shaped like the spinning Watt governor of an old steam engine; a wide box sprouting a slender braced spine, tipped with two back-angled arms, each of which ended in a smooth sphere. Modified from a secret hand-held antisubmarine tracking system, this device was an extremely sensitive mass-sensor. But rather than



measuring the gross mounds and troughs in deformed spacetime — gravity — it read the fine-scale graininess, the furrows and ditches, engraved over that geometry like ploughlines on hillsides. Most spacetime was smoothly deformed, without such surface complexity.

"Those Pentagon assholes," shouted one of them. "This is nowhere! Who'd care if we nuked this pissy little island?"

His partner waved one gloved hand dismissively. "The Eskimo might. Besides...you can't nuke away a problem like this. It's spacetime — it's just there, right. Impossible to destroy."

"Maybe we could kind of...erase it, like wipe it clean."

The other scoffed. "Well, that must be the answer, Einstein. Let's face facts. We don't know diddly-squat about where the virus came from — whether it was us or the Russkies, or whether anyone at all knows who did it. All we know is that it's going to spread, and spread. Exponential growth. Which means we have to clean it up now, while it's immature."

How long have we got?"

"They never told us. I don't know, ten, twenty years. Maybe more, maybe less. Whoever's running the project...they sure like secrecy."

"Sounds familiar. Hey. Look. I think we got us a contact!"

The mass-sensor had begun warbling. Rapid lines of encrypted data rippled onto its LCD cartouche. "Incoming," reported the soldier holding the device. "The anomaly is incoming and close."

"Range, velocity?"

"Difficult to tell. Hundreds of metres. Moving at one or two metres per sec, our ways."

The dogsbody jiggled the detector until the warble sharpened into a steady, penetrating tone. The "anomaly" was approaching from the community, backdropped by its soft irregular lights. He would soon enter the strange static wind farm, four derelict horizontal windmills surrounded by collapsed and sagging fencing. A mist of snowflakes had been stirred up by the wind, but gradually a murky, trudging silhouette emerged. His head was sagged, his footsteps dragging.

"That's our baby. He's the carrier."

The leader slipped out his Uzi, keying on the laser-sight. The red beam caught the swirling snowflakes, glorifying each of them for a brief instant.

"Uh," he called. "Hold it there, Mister Eskimo, sir!"

**F**ive minutes earlier, Naluvara was stunned on the head by a dropping fish. Just before it fell he heard a faint gasping sound, as if the air had opened its mouth in dismay. But he did not have time to ponder this. The fish undoubtedly had news of urgency. It said:

You wouldn't listen, would you? Well, now it's too late. The only advice I can give is to do what the Americans say, and don't worry about the arm. Now destroy this message.

Dr Tania Tollefson

He had destroyed it, in fact — shredding the paper into grey dust, but more out of anger than any sense of responsibility to Tania.

How many of the fish messages had she been the perpetrator of? It seemed to Naluvara that he had been receiving them for many more years than he had known Tania. The previous message, with its trite command to stay away from the old wind generators, had utterly infuriated him. He pictured her and Apik arranging trysts among the creaking white towers, among the maze of rusted generators and cables in which he and Apik had played as eight-year-olds, the ultimate defamatory of their friendship.

Now this. This completely confused him, to the point of fury. Why was she trying to confuse him? Why was she trying to turn him mad?

"Uh, hold it there, Mister Eskimo, sir!"

He froze.

Americans? Possibly. But there was no flag on their uniforms, nothing but their accents to mark them as American.

He decided that they looked dangerous, anyway. Immobile, keeping his mouth shut, he permitted them to creep cautiously nearer. They were acting as if he was wired with Semtex.

"Just hold still, sir," the one with the gun called. The other pointed a kind of tricorder at his body, carefully — incredibly carefully — scanning him from head to toe, Naluvara noted with amazement that the soldier's interest kept returning to the region of his false arm. Shocked by this, he almost completely forgot about Apik and Tania...Doctor Tania.

He squinted at the gun. The other soldier smiled awkwardly.

"We're going to have to analyze that arm of yours, sir," he said, in slowly enunciated words. "We believe you may be carrying..."

"No tech stuff," hissed the other. "This is the Third World up here. Just give him the bad news."

Naluvara was dumbstruck. The soldier shuffled closer. "Uh, listen up, friend. Are you following me?"

Frantically obedient, Naluvara nodded.

"Well, basically...we're going to have to have the arm. On its own."

To Naluvara, the scene felt oddly delirious, like a surreal early-morning dream. Yet it had its own nauseating internal consistency. Naluvara was aware that his mouth was sagging open, like one of the starved Netsilik dogs.

They wanted his arm. Yet what did the tannik know of the tunraq? These were Innupiat concerns. Just as he thought of something to say, footsteps padded up urgently. Not daring to crane his neck, he heard a woman's voice.

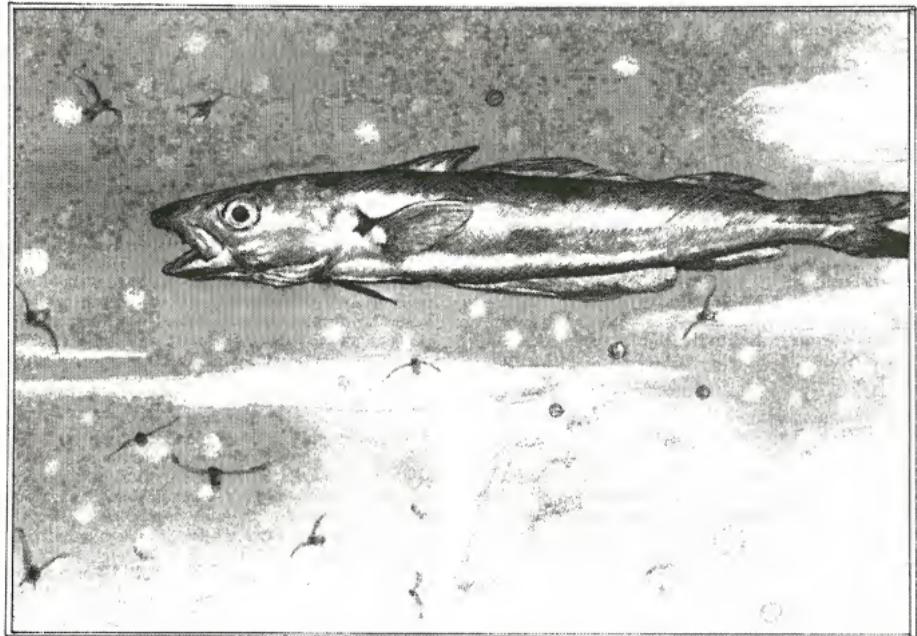
"What in hell's name!" she yelled. "Put your gun down, you bully!"

"And who the fuck are you?"

"Canadian Navy," she chirped. "We've got you bastards surrounded..."

**A**s she spoke a snowflake listened in, falling. It was the day of the Netsilik funeral, of course. In a manner the snowflake was cognizant of this. It was aware, in a sense, of the old wood-and-metal sledge, a tiny speck way over the other side of the community, near the broken-edged delineation between crystal and ocean.

The snowflake partook of spacetime. Deep within its almost fractal structure was a point, a scale, on



which matter and geometry were no longer strictly separable. Wispy fluxes of causality conjoined it to a near infinity of other discrete structures, strung across time and space. It glittered on the shore of consciousness, a stranded ice starfish.

It knew of Naluvara. It knew, hazily, of everything. It knew the vectors of the Arctic wind which carried it downward, softly, like any other snowflake.

Others were falling.

“...yeah, of course we know about the fish,” said one of the Americans. “So do the Sovs. And the Chinese. We all discovered them simultaneously. With the same message: ‘Greetings from Nunivak.’ Only the Sovs got it in Russian, the Frogs got it in French, the Chinese...well, you get the picture.”

Snowflakes were frosting the metal of his Uzi, drifting onto it with preprogrammed fervour.

“Of course, we have our own working hypothesis to explain the fish messages. In order to be unearthed simultaneously, they needed to be implanted at different epochs. The Chinese fish, we happen to know, lay underground for twenty-six thousand years. This implies phenomenal accuracy.”

“It does?”

But the newcomer was bluffing, fully understanding the American’s words. Like the American, the Canadian had a vague picture of what was going on, unbelievable as it seemed.

People in the future were interfering with the past. That was the conclusion of six independent think-tanks, a conclusion that the other powers must also

have evolved.

Evidence of the future agency’s time-travel experiments lay like messy footprints through history. The accurately targeted fish signified that the technique would eventually be perfected, but before that day there had been a long process of test and calibration, the effects of which were only now obvious.

Whoever ran the project needed data on the range and finesse of their equipment. To this end, fish – and other animals – had been hurled on random settings into the past. Their points of emergence could be deduced by a minute scrutiny of already extant local records and archives. There were, in fact, numerous instances of bizarre objects simply dropping out of thin air. Not just fish. But frogs. Stones. Anything that might stand a chance of being noticed, recorded, memorized for posterity. It was a cunning scheme. Paradox was avoided provided the records were analyzed after, not before, the projection. And how could a fall of fish rain alter history?

The message fish demonstrated that the process would one day succeed, within certain limits of uncertainty. But who would have that victory? Humanity?

The soldier gazed at his gun. It was a hunk of straight-edged ice. Before his hand froze to the grip, he sent it spinning into the snow.

“Why are you so concerned with the boy’s arm?” asked the newcomer blithely. “He’s just a harmless islander.”

Naluvara could still think of nothing promising to say. He was entranced by the slowly falling snowflakes. Somehow he was able to intuit their form in

single, dwindling flashes of insight. The symmetry of snowflakes had always worried him. Now he saw that each contained a universe of meaning.

"Miss, this Eskimo —"

"Innupiat."

"...this Innupiat — is more than he seems."

"In what way?"

The Americans exchanged glances knowingly. "He's infected."

"With what?" asked the Canadian, who did not edge away from Naluvara.

"Spacetime," said the American glibly. "Intelligent, viral spacetime."

"Look," the other offered reasonably. "We think there may have been an experiment..."

**S**omewhere among the homes and shacks a generator gave up the ghost. Lights faded into sullen brown-out, so that Naluvara's monochrome posters became moodily sepia.

They were his only company. He sat buttoning his shirt, five fingers awkward with cold and shock. His old arm felt burdensome, undersized and stiff. He had hardly worn it in three years, but now that the Americans had stolen his good one he was going to have to readjust to its quirks. It would be some while before the doctors fitted him up with a new powered version.

They had justified themselves with deranged tannik talk, none of which made much sense. His only consolation was the sure fact that the Americans had obviously not understood a thing about the tunraq. But now, come to think of it, neither had he.

Outside he saw torches moving with slow, rhythmic grace. A string of islanders were threading to the sea, to honour the Netsilik family. The unabashed birthday celebrations of Nunivak would undoubtedly ring a bit hollow to some.

He pictured Apik and Tania in the procession. Let them be, he decided, not convincing himself. Although he could see how violence was wrong on some theoretical level, what really seemed logical was to go and kick Apik in the balls until he cried, and then not stop.

But that would be immature.

As he sat moping on his bed a crooked shadow passed the window. The visitor let himself in. It was the old hunter.

Naluvara blurted: "I've lost my powers."

"Ha! You think I'm not knowing?" He grinned his unreality teeth. "You should be celebrating, young man. Your life is your own at last."

"Hmm," Naluvara agreed dubiously. "So what exactly do I do with it?"

The hunter smiled. "Ah, no lectures. You don't need any. It was the resident spirits I was trying to convince, not you. You're not needing any of my advice... just be following your nose — the spirits will keep you out of harm's way, just you see."

"They've gone, I said."

The oldest shook his head sagely. It seemed to Naluvara that the decades were peeling off him. Maybe it was just the brown-out, reducing everything to uniform antiquity, even the room's modern trapplings. As he talked, though, a creeping realization settled over Naluvara. Whereas he had always seen the spirits in purely mystic terms — the way a tannik

would — for the hunter they were simply the trusty components of a comparative technology. They were as real as nuts and bolts, as invisible as electricity or microwaves.

"How can I explain? Naluvara, this is not simple. Not at all."

"I'm not really in the mood. Not now, Ugrook."

"Ha! — of course not!" For a moment Naluvara thought that he had deterred the hunter. But after cogitating the old man began: "You remember the Netsilik who shot a bear last spring? Very cautious people, those Netsilik. They didn't want to annoy that bear's soul, even after they killed the animal. So they took the skin indoors. Prayed for it, for weeks and weeks. The smell!" He shook his head. "Okay, we islanders, we're not having to do much hunting these days. But who knows? Maybe the day will come when we do. Not tomorrow. Not next year. Maybe when you and I are dead and gone. But the Netsilik realize that the spirits, the animal souls, have long memories. Stay on the right side of them and you won't have any hunting worries after the Jet Age."

"Superstition," Naluvara said grumpily. "Who needs it." He kicked his boots across the room, then followed them to the window, exuding rudeness. Speckles of snow dotted the glass. Haloed lights plodded past, glow-worms against turquoise. The smell of freshly cooked fish reached him; more appetizing than he had anticipated.

"What I'm telling you," the hunter persisted, "is that the soul remains, even when life has gone. The soul has a long memory... or rather, the world, it has a long memory of the soul."

Naluvara's attention shifted to the snowflakes melting against the pane. Again, their endlessly detailed structure spoke volumes to him. He shook his head to clear it, but the paralyzing sense of significance did not shatter. Often he had woken from shallow dreams, convinced that every subtle and random discolouration of his wallpaper was crucial. This time the sense of heightened comprehension remained.

**A**fter the hunter had left Naluvara considered his remarks. In Innupiat terms everything had a soul. This was what the hunter believed, as resolutely as Naluvara believed in the invisible defences of the superpowers, things he certainly had never actually seen. What has once existed — even something as transient as a single and unique snowflake — can never be lost from the world. He should not therefore lose what the spirits had given him.

Behind him, signalled with a faint, brief sigh, spacetime puckered. Something fell solidly to the floor. It was not a fish this time.

He opened the envelope, slipped out the single sheet of vermillion paper:

Naluvara,

Where do I begin? With, I suppose, an order. If you have ever loved me you must be sure to destroy this immediately after you have read it — and I do mean immediately; simply transmitting this message to you constitutes treason against the Surviving States — our government these days, not to mention Nunivak's as well. Believe me, politics was one of the few things to become simpler after the Change.

The Change? Perhaps it was already manifesting

itself, when you and I were young, gaining from its future strength in feedback. We don't know much, even now.

But maybe there was an experiment. Perhaps it was the Sovs, perhaps the Americans. No one will ever know. What we do know is this: somehow a self-organizing geometry was created, in spacetime.

Some say it began in a computer. Someone was bright enough to invent an evolving program, one that could improve itself intelligently. Such a program would constantly find faster ways to run, faster ways to better itself. Snowballing, getting cleverer and swiftest by the second. Until it impacts the limits of its own hardware, the structure of the computer itself.

But that didn't halt it. It blithely transcended those limits, replaced the computer's circuits with analogous pathways moulded out of raw spacetime. What else could it do? It had been designed to improve, endlessly.

The program, then, tunneled into the underlying framework of reality. It reproduced, split off daughter fragments. You can guess the rest. You became its "host," along with a thousand or so others. You were infected with intelligent spacetime. The brain functions on a murky scale somewhere between quantum and classical physics. It seems that the computational spacetime was able to achieve a strange empathic crosstalk with you and the other hosts. I've met many of them. Ubu, a boy from Senegal. Jim, a Cambodian boy. Angie and Dawn, two twins from Soweto. An autistic Hindi girl. Others. Hundreds more. They're all adults now, but one day before then you'll meet some of them. You have to. You're our only hope. With you, the communion may have been stronger... the fact that the fragment lodged itself in your arm seems significant, in some way we don't yet understand. Whatever the case, I tried, and will continue trying, to warn you from the Wind Farm. Time's not so well understood that we know how far you can knot it, and I'll keep trying. In my past the Americans stole your arm, but it may not be the end. The fragment may have saved itself by downloading itself into your mind, in which case you'll feel its presence. This is not common, but some of the thousand have reported altered states of perception. You may feel... well, I don't know. Words would fail me, and I don't even understand the concept I'm trying to convey.

As you may have guessed, I am employed on a government project but working against it. The project grew from our increased understanding of spacetime; we don't send physical objects back, but rather the information necessary to recreate those objects in the past. But the whole purpose of the project is destructive. To abort the birth of computational spacetime, despite its clearly benign nature. The drastic and catastrophic changes in the world... what else should we expect? Our baby has taken its first breaths, and is kicking its legs in delight.

It never worked out with us, but if it will make you feel any better, neither did it work between Apik and me. You mustn't therefore blame him. In the days ahead you and your thousand new friends

will need all the help you can find. Many won't survive the changes.

I have smuggled these messages through against orders. I think they may suspect tampering, but it's a risk we must take. We all choose it.

You mustn't let us down.

— Tania

**D**ays passed, and then weeks. Colourful fireworks littered the snow, the poignant corpses of Paradise birds. The newcomer waited to return home.

Only a day left on Nunivak, and nothing concrete achieved. Here though, concrete things were too heavy for the world. She had nothing that would appease her bosses, the dark men who craved info. But the winds and the snow had utterly blunted her way of thinking. She felt like a piece of weathered and noble driftwood, carrying a tiny history of the elements upon her skin.

She had arrived bristling with the values of the superpower game, tethered by data to her stealthsubs, and one irksome shard of other-worldliness, the message in the time fish. Here there were variant paradigms. Paradigms forged from ice and snow, seal and whale.

She gazed skyward. No vapour trails, not today.

But then down came a silver thing, plummeting, twisting. She recognized it for a falling fish before it splattered against the snow, one dead eye regarding her.

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**Alastair Reynolds**, born in Wales in 1966 and now living in Scotland, is one of our latest discoveries. The above is his first published story. He works as a research student in astronomy at St Andrews University (as it happens, in close proximity to sf author and biologist Paul J. McAuley, who has also moved to St Andrews).

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# The Big Sellers, 6: David Gemmell

by Stan Nicholls

If science fiction can be characterized as the literature of ideas – a genre essentially cerebral in nature – then fantasy (and to some extent horror) can be characterized as literature concerned with emotions.

This is gross simplification, of course, and a calumny on the many writers who have supplanted cardboard cut-outs with rounded characters, and defied the clichés of hardware and chauvinism that traditionally bedevilled the field. And admittedly it is a generalization that only holds true when rigidly applying Sturgeon's Law. But if the best science fiction inspires a sense of wonder, then the best fantasy inspires a genuine involvement with its protagonists.

At their finest, David Gemmell's novels do just that. They also convey a curiously uplifting quality which transcends their subject matter, largely as a result of the presentation of characters with frailties, and occasionally less than courageous impulses. Typically, his heroes are ordinary people confronting extraordinary situations; a running theme is that of men and women of goodwill coming to the realization that they can have an impact on the tide of events.

On one level his books are about the nature of friendship, love, growing up, and accepting responsibilities – topics not readily associated with sword-and-sorcery adventures, and usually guaranteed to have me reaching for something else to read. If I don't, it is because these concerns are handled with an absence of the tweeness and tooth-rotting sentimentality that can plague novelists whose self-imposed brief is simply to entertain. More to the point, a great number of other people seem to feel the same way – with eight published novels to his credit at time of writing, Gemmell is among the top five best-selling fantasy authors in this country.

Born in 1948, in West London, David Gemmell worked for over twenty years as a journalist with provincial and national newspapers before turning to fiction. His transition to novelist came about as the result of a personal, potentially tragic, crisis.

In 1976, passing blood and losing weight, he was told he might have cancer. While waiting for test results, his wife persuaded him to distract himself by writing a piece of fiction, and in just two weeks he hammered out a novel, *The Siege of Dros Delnoch*. This had a diverse group of heroes, led by ageing fighter Druss, coming together to defend the last stronghold of the Drenai empire against an enemy called the Nadir.

Not immediately realizing that what he had written basically symbolized his own situation (he was the fortress and the Nadir the point of greatest hopelessness represented by the cancer) he nevertheless left the ending open; if he had cancer Dros Delnoch would fall, if he didn't it would survive. In the event, he turned out to be suffering from the recurrence of an old kidney injury, sustained some years earlier when he was badly beaten-up in the course of his work as a journalist.

The book was forgotten for some time. Then a friend read the manuscript, recognized its potential, and suggested Gemmell rewrite it. Following a year of revision, and retitled *Legend*, it was accepted by Century Hutchinson (now Random Century) in late 1982.

There were two main influences on *Legend*. The basic plot was based on the siege of the Alamo – reflecting Gemmell's fascination with the American Old West – or rather the Alamo story as it should have been. When he first read about it, he was impressed by the heroism of Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie, William Travis and the rest, but subsequent research revealed the story as largely myth. Most of the participants were self-seeking, if undoubtedly brave, and didn't expect to die; the management of the defence was inept and shambolic. So Gemmell's aim with *Legend* was to embody the perceived spirit of the Alamo.

The second influence centres around the patriarchal figure of Druss, to whom the book's title partly refers. Druss is a legendary warrior fighting his greatest campaign; the battle against time and his own waning powers, which was to become a recurring theme in Gemmell's later work. The

interesting thing about the character, who comes over as fundamentally more likeable, and certainly more believable, than the average fantasy hero, is that he was modelled on the author's stepfather.

Gemmell was brought up in a very violent part of London, and has around a hundred and twenty stitches on his body from fights as a child to prove it. When his stepfather (whom he describes as "a natural man of action") came into his young world the only thing he insisted on was that the boy learn to box in order to defend himself. He did learn, but being up to then a rather bookish child, and a bit of a loner, he never came to really enjoy it. The important point is that this powerful man, whose attitude to problems was to meet them head-on, would seem to have had a profound and lasting effect on Gemmell's subsequent career as a novelist.

Legend has a pantheon of youthful heroes supporting Druss, but there is no doubt he is the principal player. To engage the reader's empathy with him to the extent it does – to be audacious enough to present an old man as the central character in the first place – is a not inconsiderable achievement in itself.

Characterization is arguably Gemmell's greatest strength as a writer, and one thing *Legend* taught him was to take his characters from life; his upbringing among some tough people, and those years as a journalist, provided a good stock to draw from. And he also did something in *Legend* usually regarded as a common first-novel fault, but which actually worked quite well in this case: he based one of the characters, Rek, on himself.

Rek, a cautious individual bordering on timidity, starts out as someone more concerned with avoiding any sort of violence than indulging in heroics. Initially, he was also something of a poseur. In 1988, Gemmell commented, "He was more interested in whether his cloak was draped over his saddle correctly than getting involved in any problems. That was me." Rek, like his creator, overcame his doubts about himself through being forced into

violent confrontations, and because of the influence of his lover, Virae. Gemmell is on record as saying that the inspiration for Virae was his wife, Val.

Legend is a somewhat raw book, and suffers from first-novel crudities, not least a weakness of structure, and dialogue that occasionally looks mannered. But there is no denying its power, compulsive pace and mythic quality.

After Legend, he wrote a book called *The Chaos Warrior*, which was the life story of Druss. The publisher turned it down, saying Druss was interesting in Legend because he was old and fading, and therefore sympathetic; but when he was young, what was he but another Conan? 120,000 wasted words the wiser, he scrapped the novel and wrote another, *The King Beyond The Gate*. This was rejected too. Gemmell was experiencing the "second-novel syndrome," a fairly common complaint for writers who can lose their way following the success of an initial effort; and his publishers expressed the fear that he might be a one-book author.

He asked them if there was anything at all they liked about the book, and they said, "The title." To his credit, he took advice from them and wrote *King Beyond The Gate* Mark II. But by this time his deadline was looming, and he had to rush it, and subsequently came to consider it the least satisfying of his novels. I think this is a slightly harsh assessment. The book is less entertaining than Legend, but it has undeniable values. It also perpetuated and refined some of the themes established in the previous work.

*The King Beyond The Gate* is, loosely, a sequel to Legend, set a hundred years after the events in that book. The hero is Tenaka Khan, the Prince of Shadows, who is widely despised for his mixture of Drenai and Nadir blood. Like many of Gemmell's heroes Khan is a loner. Pragmatic, even defeatist, about the part he can play in great historic events, he finally prevails after joining forces with other like-minded individuals. As before, we have the concept of strength in unity; but also an implication that fate – or a deity – is as much a motivating force as free will.

The menace directed at the Drenai people is represented by mad Emperor Ceska, a puppet despot manipulated by two evil groupings, the Joinings and the Dark Templars. The Joinings are werebeasts, the Templars a satanic sect of supposedly unbeatable warrior priests. Another group, the Dragon – officially disbanded fifteen years before and whose survivors are beyond their prime (the tyranny of Time again) – is the nexus for the forces of Order.

These elements further develop two other motifs seeded in Legend – the complex nature of Gemmell's villains, and elite groups.

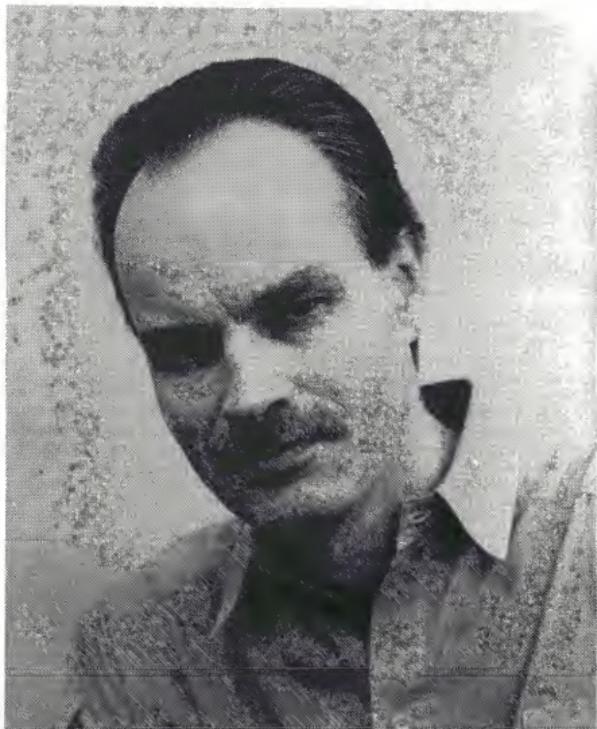


Photo of David Gemmell courtesy of Century/Legend

The villain of Legend, Ulric, has a certain nobility, and is almost sympathetic; Ceska is a portrait of a weak man driven by demons. Gemmell's intention is to avoid the tendency in fantasy to make the villains totally black. His feeling is that so many become caricatures of villainy and lose their credibility. He once explained this by citing the example of Herman Goering. While not questioning or denying the inherent evil of the Nazi leader, he pointed out that he ran great risks by obtaining exit visas for his second wife's Jewish friends, and was one of the few in Hitler's circle to confront him with complaints about the concentration camps. Gemmell's point was that once you looked beyond superficialities, Goering was revealed as a human being, albeit a deeply flawed one. His belief is that no one is ever completely evil, and in giving his villains some redeeming features it not only throws their bad aspects into relief, but also makes them more credible.

The interest in elite groups, apart from their usefulness as plot devices in this branch of fiction, stemmed from a childhood in which Gemmell belonged to none of the gangs preva-

lent in his neighbourhood, and dreamed of having lots of friends. In addition to this, during his time as a journalist he interviewed men from elite regiments, like the SAS, and noted how in their 60s and 70s they still attended reunions and displayed pride at having been part of such exclusive cliques. This group psychology, the discipline and camaraderie, came to fascinate him.

If *The King Beyond The Gate* marked a time to some extent, Waylander saw the author well into his stride. The third of the Drenai Saga (a somewhat arbitrary label as, like all of his novels, it can be read in isolation), Waylander is a classic quest story. Following the assassination of the Drenai king, an enemy army, the Vagrions, invade Drenai territory intent on total genocide. Waylander the Slayer, the archetypal lone hero by now a staple of Gemmell's stories, is the only hope. To repel the invaders and redress the balance between Order and Chaos he has to travel into Nadir lands to find a legendary Armour of Bronze. The McGuffin is that Waylander, a skilled assassin, was the man who murdered the Drenai king.

Waylander was the point at which all the elements and themes originally touched upon in *Legend* started to come together in a totally coherent way. A series of climaxes are deftly spaced, dialogue rings truer, and the pace is well orchestrated. But it was his following book, *Wolf in Shadow*, that was to provide the first totally satisfying unity of content and style.

*Wolf in Shadow* (*Jerusalem Man* in the US), which in some ways resembles a conventional thriller in structure (a field Gemmell has expressed an interest in entering), is the first of another series, the *Sipstrassi Tales*, and the nearest he has come to writing science fiction. The setting is a post-catastrophe world three hundred years after a tilt in the Earth's axis has wiped out civilization. Central character Jon Shannow, a tortured individual on a personal quest that could be termed spiritual, is peaceful in intent until his woman is taken for blood sacrifice by Abaddon, Lord of the Pit. Shannow becomes an avenger, facing black magic and an arsenal of weapons from the days before the Fall, wielded by Abaddon's Hellborn army.

Considering the accomplishment of the result, it is interesting to discover that Gemmell felt deeply unhappy about the way *Wolf in Shadow* was going when he wrote it. At the time he had just lost his job—"axed in the back by people I trusted," as he put it—and his mother was very ill, and subsequently died. Understandably, all this effected the tone of the book. The character of Jon Shannow became increasingly depressive, and Gemmell was too close to the novel to see that it was taking some spectacularly wrong turns. Always generous in acknowledging those who have helped him in his work, Gemmell credits Century editor Lisa Reeves with suggesting revisions which put it back on an even keel. Her main contribution was to suggest that he cut much of the science-fiction element and replace it with magic. "Suddenly everything channelled the right way," he recalls; and he set to rewriting the second half. Subsequently it was the first of his books to be sold in the American market.

*Ghost King*, the second of the *Sipstrassi Tales*, published in 1988, takes place earlier than *Wolf in Shadow*; and while it contains magic and mysticism it is actually nearer to a straightforward historical romance (in the purest sense of the word) than fantasy. Indeed, by his own admission, Gemmell could have as easily been an historical novelist as a fabulist, and his books tend to contain more swords than sorcery. Legend originally had very little sorcery; when it came back for revisions the publisher asked for more magic, and the supernatural elements were grafted on at that stage.

The reason he does not write historical novels or biographies is because most of the things which intrigue him about history ended badly. An example is one of his great heroes, the 13th-century Scottish noble William Wallace, who raised a peasant army and drove the English out. The Scottish establishment of the time, realizing they were in danger of having a new order imposed which would erode their privileges, betrayed him. Wallace was taken to London and publicly executed. Fantasy allows Gemmell to create worlds where characters like Wallace are not betrayed, or survive and win if they are. An alternate-world version of the story of someone like Wallace is out because Gemmell recognizes science fiction isn't his forte; and he is mindful that the amount of research needed to make such a setting credible could swamp the storytelling impetus.

While not pretending to historical accuracy, *Ghost King* nevertheless takes place against a background of cities and areas which actually existed in Roman Britain, and some of the characters are based on real people. He has gone back to the events which some historians believe may have been the origin for the Arthurian legends. One character, Cunobelin, was a warrior chieftain who reigned for forty years from his base at Camulodunum, and his exploits may well have come down to us as the story of King Arthur.

In a kind of reversal of *Legend*, the hero of *Ghost King* is a boy called Thurso, son of the High King Aurelius Maximus. (The suspicion is that Thurso, more interested in reading than fighting, is another incarnation of the author.) But he is aided in his battle against the machinations of the Witch Queen by Culain, elderly Lord of the Lance, a character whose mission becomes a race to impart wisdom to his young charge before death overtakes him. Obviously this is a variation on the story of Arthur and Merlin; confirmed when we learn of the existence of an Excalibur-like Sword of Power.

*Ghost King* is one of the more successful reworkings of a fairly well-mined area. It is a compelling and pacey action adventure with few pretensions beyond entertainment, and is no less impressive a piece of storytelling for that.

The third *Sipstrassi Tale*, *Last Sword of Power*, is set against the chaos following the Roman Empire's decline. Free of occupation, Britannia faces a new threat from the Goths and their charismatic leader Wotan, an apparently unstoppable conqueror drawing his strength from the forces of evil. Roman-born Uther—the "Blood King"—and his alliance of British tribes may be the only one able to oppose Wotan. But Uther, despite his awesome reputation as a warrior chief and possession

of a Sword of Power (we learn there is more than one) is, true to form, an old man, struggling to hold together the disparate elements of his kingdom.

The wild card is introduced in the figure of Revelation, who proves to be legendary man of arms Culain Iach Feragh, who is said to be a survivor of the lost continent of Atlantis, and practitioner of a sorcery as potent as Wotan's. Revelation befriends Cormac Daemonsson—a fourteen-year-old outcast found as a baby among a litter of black pups in a mountain cave—and blind sorceress Anduine, quarry of Wotan's legions of men and demons.

An interesting counterpoint is that while Uther, like Druss in *Legend*, is desperate to hang on to life in order to achieve victory for his people, *Revelation*, an immortal, longs above all to drop the burden of longevity and meet his end as a human.

In my view, *Last Sword of Power* may be Gemmell's best novel to date. The characters, as ever, are exemplary, the dilemmas they face are believable despite being fantastic, and there are some excellent action set-pieces. Which is not to take anything away from *Knights of Dark Renown* (1989) or his latest published book to date, *The Last Guardian*.

*Knights of Dark Renown*, a medieval fantasy unrelated to either the *Drenai* or *Sipstrassi* series, appears to be a one-off. A brotherhood of warriors, the Knights of the Gabala, whose duty is to protect the Nine Duchies, disappear through a portal into a kind of parallel world. But one, Manannan, obeys his instinct to stay behind. Inevitably, he becomes known as the Coward Knight for this apparently craven act, and is tortured by his conscience because of it. But when the Duchies are threatened by dark magic, Manannan is the only one to stand for them. The *Last Guardian* completes the saga of Jon Shannow, facing a reptilian army admitted to his present via a gateway to the past. Not the least of the appeal of these two novels lies in watching the continuing development of a fine gift for the telling of tales.

Gemmell's plots may not be blindingly original, as I think he would be the first to agree, yet somehow the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. And there is that quality of uplift I mentioned at the start. If pushed to identify unifying factors in his work, beyond the purely thematic, I would say optimism and decency. These are moral tales, in the most acceptable sense of the word.

He contends his books have an essentially religious basis, although this is in no way intrusive, or particularly apparent on first reading. He is a Christian, with strong views on the subject, and would say, perhaps, that the qualities I have identified spring

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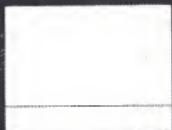
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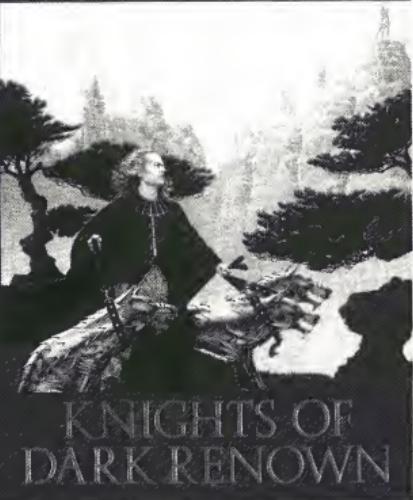


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KNIGHTS OF DARK RENOWN



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## KNIGHTS OF DARK RENOWN

from that belief. (As a non-Christian, I might argue that the values put forward could as well be termed Humanistic, but that is beside the point.)

Whatever his source of inspiration, whatever light he may be following, I can only say that he has brought me to a renewed interest in a field - fantasy - which I have long considered moribund. But then that probably has more to do with Gemmell than the genre. What I do know is that he passes a fundamental test for successful fiction - almost always, the experience does not come to an end with the book.

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**Note:** previous subjects in the "Big Sellers" series of essays include *Douglas Adams* (number 30), *Stephen R. Donaldson* (number 32), *Terry Pratchett* (number 33), *Anne McCaffrey* (number 34) and *L. Ron Hubbard* (number 35). Copies of all these issues are still available from Interzone's main address at £2.30 each, postage included.

There will be no "Big Sellers" features in the next two issues - to make space for a Greg Bear serial and a special Brian Aldiss 65th birthday celebration. We intend that the series will resume with Interzone 39, our September number - out in August 1990.

## WRITE TO INTERZONE

We enjoy receiving feedback from our readers, and we hope to publish a lively letter column in each issue. Please send your comments, opinions, reactions, to the magazine's main editorial address. We may not be able to reply to all letters, but we do read them and may well be influenced by them.

# The Nexus

## Steven Widdowson

1. Between the close brick arches of the overpass, hidden in the liana's leafy tangle, I found the nest again. The hen shot up from nowhere, a blur of black and red. Her cry echoed like a final warning and the jungle fell silent.

There were two eggs now, the new one blotched with red and orange: so the variation was continuing, accelerating even. It was the green egg, the older one, that I had come to see. As the insect clamour rose again, it rocked back and forth, animated from within. I watched, oblivious to the hen as she crashed in and out of the upper foliage. The shell cracked, showing the tip of an indigo beak.

Then I did it, used my thumbnails to widen the crack. I was impatient, a long way from home with the afternoon already darkening. The shell resisted at first so I pulled harder. It spilled out onto the floor of the nest, a naked horror. I dropped the pieces and fell back, then turned and ran. Roots and ground creepers caught my feet and I stumbled against fallen bricks. I reached the highway hurt and bleeding and out of breath, and stopped long enough to be sick.

I washed my hands by a broken water main, trying to lose the stench of the albumen, trying to sluice away the sight of it. Beyond its tip the beak extended back along the beast's full length, burgeoning into spikes and a cluster of jointed, armoured limbs that I did not stay to count. I saw no eyes, and doubt that it had any. It opened like a mollusc and a thin, snake-like tongue emerged from a pit that was blacker than darkness. I knew that it was consuming the light. And I felt sure it could not live.

That was yesterday, and the image persists. My actions precipitated the monstrous birth, cancelled the glorious emergence I had expected. So now I will begin in earnest, and this journal, that I have tried so many times to start, will be my exorcism. It could go either way. Perhaps I will drive out the demon notion that has settled on my mind, and be content at last. Or perhaps the demon will drive me out. In which case my journal may have some worth, if it survives the cataclysm that I fear is upon us. This life in-between is becoming untenable, a confusion of possibilities. Sometimes I feel the whole world is in here with me, that everything since Contact has been a dream I cannot shake.

Once there was a scientist called Schrödinger, a quantum magician. He studied the mechanics of the microscopic, the private behaviour of elementary particles. And he conceived a fairy tale about a cat, an illustration of the hidden aspects of reality.

Placed in a sealed box the cat faced possible death. The box contained a deadly gas that could be released at random. In one version of the story a valve opened on an impulse from a Geiger counter which faced a small piece of radium. When the box was re-opened the cat's fate was discovered, its life or death depending upon the decay of one of the radioactive nuclei.

Schrödinger taught that observation is an act, that until the box was opened the fate of that key nucleus was indeterminate, neither decayed nor undecayed. By extension, until the box was opened the cat would be neither dead nor alive, would exist in an unobserved, and unobservable, limbo.

He could have been talking about me.

### 2. Something is happening to the Nexus.

Last night the journey to Antarctica was particularly vivid. Dreaming is the only way possible these days, I was an instant only in reaching the South Downs and joining the flow of sleeping souls that migrate out of Britain every night. Over the Channel we merged with other, lesser flows. Crossing the thin belt of Europe our numbers tripled: a brilliant highway now, the midnight rush hour. Over the deserts of northern Africa the host grew beyond count. I saw the Atlantic coast unwind below us, and then we struck off across the Southern Ocean towards the ice.

Above the Weddell Sea we slowed to the speed of a fast jet, coming to rest on a low peak fifty miles into the ice-sheet. This used to be Berkner Island, is now the Nexus. There we come together every night, our presence a small bright sphere that blinds even the sleeping eye.

The flow is constant, our arrival a part of the cycle of sleeping and waking that runs endlessly around the world. As we who have just begun to dream move south to the Nexus, so those who prepare to wake take their leave for the temperate regions of the north. There in the Nexus is vested the dreaming consciousness of the world.

It is hard to say what happens there. At an uncertain distance across the ice the white veil stands inviolate – and we watch, confer, witness. While the rest of the world goes about its waking business, taking its turn at the physical, it is there in the Nexus, in the bright cocoon of uncluttered reality, that endorsements and censorships are made.

### 3. I had to go back, to take another look. I was sure it would be dead, that I would be safe from the probing tongue. It had haunted me for days, and I hoped to lay

the ghost for good. So this morning I left my building and headed away from the river, ignoring the lights. Behind me the low cloud glowed fitfully with reflected blues and pinks, a sure sign of mutation. Somewhere along the overgrown banks of the Thames the reptiles were busy.

This time I had trouble finding the overpass. The broken main gave me a pointer, but from there it took me half an hour to find it. Usually I pass these ways with ease, avoiding the snags and hidden masonry as if on remote control.

It was hot. The foliage was thick here, transpiring heavily. Condensation glistened on the worn bricks. A cloud of tiny silver moths passed by my head, and I choked on the dust from their wings. Above me, beneath the dark overhang, an electric-blue gecko scuttled between mosses. And suddenly I was in the right place.

The undergrowth was flattened as if by a blast. Dead creepers hung like skeletons from the brickwork. Everything was overlaid with a brown, greasy stain, and there was a smell that I could not place. A few dead moths fell from my hair, and I knew I had carried them to their death. The jungle pressed in, threatening to crush the small, cold vacuum I had found. The screeching and scratching of insects reached a new volume, suffocating and unbearable. I started to shiver. There was no nest, no egg, no bird to harass me. The monster was gone. It should have died, I told myself, it should have died.

4. I remember everything. The Nexus binds our sleeping minds, provides a light to see by. I remember the beginning, the day the world changed.

Contact: the encounter at last, the visit of the aliens. It happened not in the bright realms of the stars, where we were learning to live, but in the uncharted inner space that we were learning to forget, the last wastelands of Antarctic ice.

The first days were full of portent. Storms and volcanoes stirred the air, whilst vague fermentations and shiftings could be felt in the Earth's foundations. Then, as we began to despair, the Earth settled again and the oceans' frenzy quieted. The focus shifted: we looked up and saw a sky full of apparitions, of saucers and spheres and comets that glowed by day and shooting stars like golden rain. Some things shimmered in the high, rarefied light as if unused to three dimensions. They stretched beyond all horizons, blanketing the globe. The planet was stilled. We held our breath, expecting Armageddon.

On the fourth day of the visitation the drift southwards began, a uniform flow from all points of the sky. To look upwards for an hour was to see a million craft glide past, their motion so smooth that it seemed as if the ground was moving instead.

For three days and nights the drift continued, until the skies were clear again. The alien fleet converged over the uninhabited ice of the southern pole, there presumably to come to earth. Outwardly, life returned to normal.

The first news came in a frantic call from the Chinese research facility at Hope Bay, on the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. An Argentinian radio station broadcast a recording of it, and the excitement started. There was no panic, more a breathless, impossible

level of anticipation. By silent, mutual consent the cities and industries of the world began an indefinite holiday.

The air in London was light, unseasonably warm, and the mood was festive, like New Year's Eve. We followed closely the news from the south, wondering how long we would have to wait.

After Hope Bay we heard from Buenos Aires and São Paulo. The details differed, but the basic description of the apparition was always the same: humanoid, a hundred metres tall, the colour of Antarctic ice. By that time it was clear it would be in the northern Atlantic within three or four days. My work, my writing, slipped from me like an old skin; deadlines and research became irrelevant as I began to prepare. My limited circle of friends and contacts dissolved, gave way to the much wider circle of humanity, accessible now as never before.

5. Contact. The white form strode across the ocean, bringing its changes. As it progressed northwards its influence was felt across the world, a revitalizing current that spread around the lines of latitude.

The reports from the south continued, growing more fantastic as it approached. It crossed the equator near Ascension Island, and the descriptions were beyond belief. It was attended now by a myriad of flying and swimming forms, all of the same perfect whiteness, some familiar and some mythical. Albino bats and phoenixes darted about its head, whilst the sea it walked on was churned to white foam by mermaids and serpents. It crossed the forty-eighth parallel and we had the report of a delirious Paris. We waited, counting the minutes.

We were out in the streets, a hundred great crowds across the breadth of London, suddenly quiet. When it came we felt the slight, silent tingling of a nervous way. It ran through us and out across Germany, Poland and Russia, crossed the Pacific and the great plains of Canada. In that thin moment we all felt its progress, a shared experience of quiet smiles: the English way, even then. It passed to the north, another giant footprint in the ocean taking the ring of light towards all the vast spaces and voids of the world that it had yet to touch.

The crowds dispersed. The work I had been waiting for was ready at last, the world had begun again. I went back to my flat, knowing that I would be remaining, that I would be well placed there while most of those around me would have to leave.

And that was it. No drums or trumpets, no bangs or whimsiers, just a sense of purpose that had been missing, and a slightly increased visual contrast, as if the shadows were all a shade blacker and the light a few shades whiter.

6. We don't keep calendars any more, but I know how long it has been, if not in years. My hair is becoming grey and thin. I am still in London, and apart from the occasional chance meeting I am alone. It is better that way. We meet each night of course, and upon our journey south and our return exchange a few thoughts and emotions, are briefly intimate. I do not deliberately shun the waking company of others, simply prefer my few hours of privacy.

I live in the same flat, halfway up the north face of

a great glass and concrete tower, part of the high-rise village that oppresses the landscape south of the river. I share my building with rats and mice and pigeons, a family or two of foxes, and a few of those that have no name. They are friendly enough, and do not run from my presence or presume to invade my rooms.

At street level, in the shadows of the towers, the lower buildings are further enclosed by a maze of bridges and flyovers. Down there a new community of cave life is flourishing. Bats and lizards and strangely coloured snakes infest the hanging jungles of mosses and creepers. This morning I spotted a new growth of white on one of the lower arches. Investigating, I found a mass of cup-sized flowers, grotesquely beautiful. Their curves and folds suggest the startling proportions of a new bee. That is the ninth species of orchid this summer.

The city is fascinating in decay, much more so than the beauty of the unchecked countryside. I love my work.

7. At night, as I rise to join the southward flow, I look down and see central London laid out like a half-drawn map. Something in the pattern of the towers is striking. They stand out from the jungle like the characters of a giant alphabet, suggestive and disturbing.

The one I live in is part of a group that makes an incomplete figure eight. To the east of that another group stands as a huge inverted vee, and further east again there is an oval, the largest of them all. Just beyond that, the flat tops of two communication towers complete the sequence. I know it is significant. The Nexus tells me that such preoccupations are the last strands of my entanglement with the pre-Contact world. Even so, I cannot let them go, I am bound by the myths of my childhood.

I have a jeep. Occasionally I leave the work and venture out of London, attempting a passage through the rapidly dwindling network. Drawn along arteries and byways, flying around the interchanges and ring-roads of deserted ruins, I move as if in a whirlpool. These are journeys of alchemy, not necessity: the Nexus has taught us all the art of effortless travel. Yet I must live with my myths, with what the young ones call the decision of my birth. I have a foot in each reality. The old world sleeps fitfully inside me, and I cannot deny the new.

London is beautiful and mysterious, and like all other cities it is almost deserted. Since Contact the birth rate has declined, and most prefer to live away from the old centres. We all choose the time and place of our coming into the world, and unlike my generation, those who have come since Contact have chosen well. The Nexus pervades the waking world like an atmosphere, a subtle influence easily overlooked. It is something more than the sum of the world's sleeping consciousness. Somewhere within its bright convolutions the seeds of future generations are already enfolded.

There is wisdom in the eyes of a new-born baby. At one time the wisdom faded as the baby learned its new role, but now it remains and matures beyond the first day and the first month, and the young progress steadily from their initial state of grace. All I know for certain is that as my generation dwindles, the

workings of the Nexus take turnings that I cannot begin to comprehend.

Without holocaust or catastrophe the world has shed the accumulated dross of technology. A new growth is healing the marks of industrialization: extinct grasses and flowers re-appear miraculously between the concrete and the tarmac, whilst the new exotic forms cling to the less accessible heights of brick and glass. Cooling towers are green with creepers, supporting vast colonies of birds and bats. I devote my days to the study of this unfolding paradise, and spend the hours before sleep in increasing confusion.

So the Nexus evolves, and I move nearer and nearer to my exorcism, to the final act of my inherited myths. It is the only way to accommodate what passes for reality these days. At night, joined with the Nexus, the former reality is obsolete, and the white of the southern ice is a kaleidoscope of patterns and sequences lost to me on waking. A few of us near the end of our time raise occasional vibrations relating to meaning and purpose, and the young ones smile condescendingly in acknowledgement of our eccentricity, unable to understand our need for structure. And we have no answer, other than it is our eccentricity.

8. More than once since I began the journal I have been surprised by certain images, have found myself reaching for the ghost of a memory.

Sometimes it was easy. Schrödinger came to me like a flash of lightning, his parable echoing all too painfully the fate of the thing I found in the egg. More often the connection has proved elusive, causing me long periods of distraction.

Some observations of the approach to the Weddell Sea, scribbled down immediately after waking:

From this height the Atlantic shimmers like a multi-hued silk, the currents showing as separate veins of colour. They are too slow to follow, those arterial shifting: distance transforms thin water to an infusion of gum arabic.

Near the end the colours fade to a milky white, the currents lose themselves in the deepening cold. Ahead the wind whips up featherly plumes of snow into a curtain of vapour that almost reaches our altitude. We swoop low, drawn by a luminosity from the water, and all around us the white shower falls, thickening as we go further south. Ahead is the glow, the precious glow.

Since I wrote this I have been able to think of little else. This morning I sketched the aerial view of the tower blocks. The shapes leapt out from my memory: the sluggish stirrings of distantly-viewed water and the soaring white curtain that shrouds the Pole were suddenly fixed. I have seen them all before in my imagination, have read their descriptions in writings that pre-date my birth by generations. The eight, the vee and the oval were chasms in the earth, deep and overgrown; a single connected chain cut in ancient times, and choked with centuries of growth. Within them a man sought escape from a nightmare, and found none. There is little chance of finding the book amid the city's overgrown decay. It was written by a man called Poe.

Distant as he was from the end of the world, he was close to the archetypes. Like others of his era,

Schrödinger included, he enjoyed a freedom of access lost in the global confusion of later years. His vision is indisputable now. At the very end Poe's hero, Arthur Gordon Pym, free from the island of chasms and approaching the Antarctic continent, was confronted by a vision. The human form, huge and white, that Pym saw, has since walked across the world, from pole to pole.

As Poe died he relived his hero's imprisonment in the hold of a ship, imagined that he was dying of thirst. The true nature of his story, written when Antarctica was alien and unexplored like the planets, is crystal clear. As he died he recognized it for the prophecy it was.

When the form passed this way its virgin whiteness dispelled the shadows of death that we invoked against each other: nation to nation, person to person. We felt the icy freshness of its homeland, looked into the mist and saw our own form, gigantic and bright and undeniable in its force. It bestows a glow of power that is almost physical. Sometimes I feel extended, aware of a field unbounded by the senses' usual radius. Sometimes I close my eyes and feel a multiplicity of bodies.

9. Just returned from a drive round the north of the city. I must get this down before it fades. For the first time in years I stayed away from the Nexus, wanting to see the city at night, to renew my acquaintance with the dark. I almost killed myself before I realized what was happening, almost drove right into the solid black bulk of it. I would be lying there now, twisted inside twisted steel, rotting on the motorway.

I was desperate for speed, edging fifty miles an hour on the smoother stretches, orbiting the city like a rogue satellite. The moon was quartered, glowing faintly behind a layer of cloud, the skyline a vague silhouette that seemed too near. Soft flashes of ground lightning erupted, giving it colour: blue and pink again from the river, and yellow or orange from the mazes of the old West End. The lightning suggested intense activity, and I couldn't help classifying, identifying: blue and pink for reptile, orange for mammal, yellow for insect. The mutation follows its own rhythm, is not bound by the hours I keep.

I had the window down, and the first thing I noticed was the smell. It was throaty and sterile, and this time I recognized it, but I was too intent on the road to make the connection immediately. Then the cold was upon me again, and the wind that whipped around the window had the texture and temperature of death. All in an instant this happened, and the skyline ahead was obscured by something on the road. My mind stopped right there, but the jeep went on, guided by reactions I never knew I had. It plunged into a thick mass of brambles and spun round, sending earth and weeds into the air.

A black silhouette towered up towards the clouds, splitting to reveal a veen-shaped field of dull silver as the tongue emerged. It writhed like a snake, disturbed by the crash and tasting for prey. The air was thick with the smell of creosote, too thick for there to be any sound. I got out of the jeep and felt pain, a sharp line of fire in my leg. From nearby a yellow flash provided a moment of clarity, and the beginning of a route back home. The shape before me was untouched

by the colour, remained blacker than the space between the clouds. As I had noted before, it consumed light.

10. Every night I join the dreamers at the edge of the southern wastes, I face the veil that hides the planet-fall of aliens. Within the Nexus there is a place where my nightly business lies, a place apart from the shifting energies and ceaseless flux. The separation is not spatial: the Nexus is a soft blue aura of a few inches, enclosing a dimensionless point. That special place within is reached across an interval of mind. Still I find myself restructuring the dream, forging memories of corridors and rooms, of movement. That seed experience of union must, it seems, be wrapped around with tantalizing architectures, with geometries as obscure as the maze of thought and image that is my birthright.

My place of business has the character of a library. Each night I deposit my observations of the emerging forms of urban life: the new mutations, the new directions of growth. There are others like me; each night the stock of gene-patterns is larger than the night before.

There are other rooms as well. I have not yet explored them, am too involved in my work, in logging the labyrinthine variations of form and function that I encounter each day in the jungle.

I spend my days moving around London, finding the routes that are still clear of growth, following the spoils of the new inhabitants. Stalking is easy; there is no fear of the human, and more important, nothing for the human to fear. I find rabbits, badger and deer, feral varieties of dog and cat, an ever-growing number of lizards and large insects, and things that have not yet been named. The new forms move within their own pale light, the aura of their newness. I have no trouble finding them. I suspect that at the head of this evolutionary surge the boundaries between plant and animal are dissolving, or being redefined beyond my understanding. All I can do is observe, let every minute detail of scale or fur or petal impose upon my inner eye just long enough to be carried to the Nexus.

The mutation is prolific, and therefore fragile. Most of the new forms do not fit into any discernible ecological niche, and left alone would die before they could breed. There is a morphic resonance at work here, operating between the dimensions of the Nexus and the city. In the library the new patterns are crystallized, given a reality beyond the physical; and here in the world the new form gains a foothold, begins to flourish.

Every day I leave my flat to continue the task, drawn by the unmistakable, pulsing aurae of mutation. And every night the gene pool widens and deepens.

11. Something is definitely happening. A change is imminent. There is a pattern here that I cannot quite touch.

It began with the egg, with Schrödinger, and continued with Poe and the ordeal of Arthur Gordon Pym. And now I must admit a parallel sequence whose beginning I find hard to pinpoint.

There is something during take-off, a twist, something in the timeless interval of transition before I rise from my bed and sense the southward flow. How can I get this onto paper? For those of us born before Contact

the take-off is not instantaneous; we cannot slip away in a moment as the young ones can. (I have seen their eyes glaze over in mid-sentence, their heads nod forward before they regain control; missing barely a word, they have travelled to the Nexus and back, beckoned by a signal too subtle for me to catch.) For us the process is a ritual, governed still by diurnal rhythms, beginning with deep relaxation. We call it "unscrewing the world."

Lying in bed at the edge of sleep, I watch the ceiling dissolve. The clouds follow, leaving a clear view of the stars. I am aware of the pressure of the mattress on my back, the coolness of the air as I inhale. Time is indeterminate. I only know that at some point the heavens begin to rotate and I lose touch with my body.

Unscrewing the world: imagine the starred sky as a dome, a lid, and imagine someone removing the lid. There is a sound like the unoiled movement of a fine brass thread, echoing across the world from just below the horizon's circle. And then the sky is still and it is me who is spinning, my awareness light and ethereal like a sycamore seed falling through the night. I pick up the direction and move.

And here at the prelude of my nightly flight, as the world unscrews, there is a moment of double vision. Simultaneous perceptions: I am the spinning seed, searching for the flow to the Nexus, and at the same time I am still on my bed, watching the stars turn. The sound grows to a roar as the lid is about to be removed. Another second and I am over the South Downs, and back in my room the sound has stopped. My tower has inverted, become a pit, and I am halfway down it, gasping for air. The tongue appears, blacker than black, and wraps around me and draws me further downwards, spinning and boring through concrete and rock, entering the dark, solid places beneath the earth.

Each time this other dream, this nightmare, lasts a little longer. I am plunged deeper into suffocating heat, where no light ever penetrates. One night soon the world will unscrew completely, and I will arrive at the Nexus to see myself emerging from beneath the ice. Or it will be the other way around.

12. Last night in the Nexus something frightened me, almost woke me up. I see it now as a dark patch hovering over the gene pool. It shimmered and disturbed me, and I had to ignore it at first, divert my gaze to log the patterns of the day. It was only on leaving, at the point of disconnection, that I looked at it. It moved with a life of its own, larger than my first impression, a black shape insinuating itself into the fabric of the library. The code of the beast.

Since Contact no one has ventured to the pole, nor even far enough to stand awake on Berkner Island. The Nexus perceives from a distance, catching emanations from the white veil that hides the main ice. What lies beyond, where the aliens landed, is an enigma.

Sometimes I close my eyes and see the white figure grown even taller, unbearably white against a cloudless night sky that shows no stars. The image burns, the contrast is unthinkable. It is a feeling similar to take-off, when the world is being unscrewed: an internal tension, a stretching of impossible membranes.

Schrödinger again: perhaps the box is opened and

the cat is found dead. And perhaps then, at the moment of looking, the world splits and the cat is also found alive. Suppose Contact was the beginning, the setting up of an experiment; and suppose the time is nearing for the experiment's conclusion, the opening of the box. When the world unscrews, which way do I really go? What if the aliens came too late to prevent catastrophe, and this utopia is nothing but a dream of the survivors? We have all become Schrödinger's cat.

I am old, and having, it is said, chosen the moment of my birth, I am now approaching a final choice. Each night the world unscrews a little more, and I come closer to an inevitable meeting. Soon my concurrent journeys to the south, by air and by earth, will end together. Then I think one of me will go under, and one will continue. And that could be the night when the stars rotate a full seven times, and the sky is lifted free from the rim of the world. And, lying on my bed before the final take-off, I may catch a glimpse of what lies between. Until then I can only watch and wait.

Each night I leave my sleeping body for the freedom of the earth and the air and the spinning stars. Each night I face the breaking of the seal.

---

Steven Widdowson, born in 1950 and now teaching at a school in York, is the author of "The Ibis Experiment" (IZ 15). The above is only his second published story in four years, though in the interim he has completed a horror novel. We're pleased to welcome him back to these pages.

# CARRION COMFORT

THE EPIC NOVEL OF TERROR  
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 HEADLINE

# Fairly Rich, Fairly Quick

## Charles Platt

Standard Disclaimer: my views do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors. The opinions that I will be expressing are, as the saying goes, solely my own.

**Y**et another failed attempt by this writer to get fairly rich, fairly quick." That was how Michael Moorcock once reviewed a book of mine, and of course he was correct. But I didn't mind the jibe. I was comforted by the knowledge that there were hundreds of other writers in the science-fiction field — including Moorcock himself in his early days — who had tried to get "fairly rich, fairly quick" just as unsuccessfully as I had.

Highly publicized million-dollar payments to authors such as Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov have tempted people to believe that most science-fiction writers are comfortably well-off. Unfortunately, there is a vast financial gulf between Big Names who sell exceptionally well (Clarke, Asimov, Piers Anthony, Robert Silverberg, the late Robert Heinlein, the late Frank Herbert...) and the rest of us. These days, most American science-fiction paperback authors are paid \$3,000 to \$7,500 per title; and as I understand it, the situation in Britain is much the same.

At rates such as these, one has four options:

1. The defeatist option. Treat writing as a hobby, and get a part-time or full-time job to pay the rent.

2. The poor-but-proud option. Write full-time producing one carefully crafted, enduring novel and a dozen solid short stories each year, and live on beans in the hope that sooner or later literary integrity will be financially rewarded.

3. The mass-production option. Write as much formula-fiction as possible, as fast as possible, and get rich from quantity as opposed to quality.

4. The half-and-half option. Write a book for yourself, taking your time; then write something blatantly commercial to rake in some cash.

**O**ption 4 is my own preference, though in bygone years, when I was less willing to sit at a keyboard for too many days in a row, I chose Option

3. In the early 1970s, for instance, it was my habit to spend a week writing a porno novel for Olympia Press, then take the \$2,000 that they paid me and go travelling around the United States for a few months.

Unfortunately, hastily-written books have a habit of surviving to haunt their creator. *Planet of the Voles*, which I produced in four days when I was first in New York City and had no work permit, still turns up in second-hand bookstores, much to the delight of "friends" who amuse themselves by buying copies and dumping them in front of me at unexpected moments, suggesting that I might like to endorse my immortal masterpiece with a signature and some suitable good wishes.

Still, as I say, I am not alone in having written for money as well as for art. The proof of this is all around: in trashy movie novelizations, *Dr Who* books, or — here's an interesting example — the Warhammer series of fantasy novels.

**I** first heard the word "Warhammer" when I visited London in 1988 and attended the World Fantasy Convention. David Garnett, a talented British writer whose annual *Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook* contains savvy commentary on the field, mentioned to me over a pint of warm British beer that I might be able to make £10,000 writing a quick novel in a new fantasy series.

"I don't think that's a good idea, David," I said. "After all, I've published essays denouncing fantasy novels as a kind of literary cancer. I think fantasy stinks."

"You could use a pseudonym," Garnett suggested.

But I wasn't listening. I was rewinding my memory tape. "Wait a minute, did you just say ten thousand pounds?"

Garnett explained to me that Warhammer was a role-playing game like Dungeons and Dragons. Its manufacturers had made a fortune selling little lead and plastic models of weird beasts, and now they wanted to diversify into books that shared the "Warhammer universe." Known authors could expect to receive the £10,000 that Garnett had mentioned as a combination of money in advance and subsequent guaranteed royalties.

"These people aren't like book pub-

lishers," he said. "They've got real money, and they don't understand the pittance we normally work for. You could do one of these easily. You already write *Interzone* columns for David Pringle. Well, he's the editor that Games Workshop have hired."

How could this be? The well-known J.G. Ballard fan, editor of the western world's most literate and innovative science-fiction magazine, now finding employment commissioning books about swordsmen hacking up goblins and trolls?

But lo, it was so. Nor did Mr Pringle show any shame. He was determined, he said, to publish high-quality books about swordsmen hacking up goblins and trolls. He was even poised and ready to endorse these books in his own magazine.

So, I succumbed. Like several other writers, I hid my shame behind a pseudonym and said, "Yes, yes, send me the necessary source materials so I can produce for you the exciting Warhammer adventure that deep down inside, I've always known I wanted to write!"

Imagine my horror when I received by air mail, at huge postal expense, a stack of rule books a foot thick crammed with more than a million words of pedantic detail pertaining to this imaginary realm. Hundreds of different creatures, each with its own unique powers. Towns, weapons, costumes, magic spells, rituals, gods — Warhammer seemed to be the life's work of a grubby horde of obsessive-compulsive anal-retentive maniacs. Was I supposed to absorb all of this? It didn't even have an index!

Worse still, as I started ploughing through it, I found that some "facts" contradicted other "facts," and that additional "facts" weren't mentioned at all. It was an ill-conceived, amateurish mess. As a result, it was only after I'd outlined my projected novel that I discovered the Warhammer world was "two or three times" as big as Earth (two, or three? I never did discover which) and it had two moons.

Faced with a major rewrite of my plot to conform with these sudden revelations, I almost gave up. But I admonished myself not to be so defeatist. After all, most people actually

paid money to own these rule books, and they read them for pleasure. I was being bribed with £10,000, wasn't I? Didn't that seem fair?

So I did my rewrite and sent it in. After pondering it for a month or two, the creators of Warhammer told me there were still some grave errors. Trolls would be too stupid to lay siege to a town in the manner I had described. Beastmen and mutants were indigenous to many areas of the Warhammer world, not just the Chaos Wastes. The soul of a mere Chaos Champion would serve no purpose bound into a sword; it would have to be of a Daemon Prince. And so on, and so forth.

By this time I was suffering fits of self-loathing. How could I allow myself to squander irreplaceable brain cells memorizing this claptrap? It wasn't even my own claptrap; it was second-hand. In fact, most of it smelled so old, it might even be third-hand. I was no fantasy expert, but it seemed to me as if some of the creatures were highly Tolkiennesque, while the Warhammer "chaos" concept stirred echoes of Moorcock, and their "colours of magic" inevitably reminded me of Terry Pratchett.

But I couldn't find out how much of a ripoff Warhammer really was without actually reading Tolkien, Moorcock and Pratchett; and I'd subjected myself to enough punishment already without enduring that. In any case, it was too late to have second thoughts about the job. I had a moral obligation to my editor. He had told his bosses that I was a true professional; I could be counted upon; I would deliver. On this basis, they had already scheduled publication of the book that I had not yet written. Poor Mr Pringle would find it embarrassing (or worse) if I suddenly said I didn't feel like doing it after all.

So I wrote it. I think it took four weeks, working every day, ten or twelve hours a day, but the period is such a blur, now, that I can't be sure. I researched the names of parts of sailing ships. I made sure my goblins were the right colour. I gave my Daemon Prince the correct deformities. I got into the spirit of the thing when my Bad Guy plunged his sword into an orc's ear. I mean, I really tried!

**T**hen, when I had almost completed my task, the first Warhammer novel was published: *Drachenfels* by Jack Yeovil. In case anyone wondered who "Jack Yeovil" really was, the creators of Warhammer cheerfully revealed (in their self-serving magazine *White Dwarf*) that Yeovil was Kim Newman. Evidently the Warhammerians couldn't conceive of Newman being embarrassed by his association with them. If he wanted to use a pseudonym, I guess they assumed he was just being a bit shy.

The cover of *Drachenfels* was somewhat baffling. It looked like an under-exposed photograph of a block of granite, printed in magenta and black and overprinted with the "Warhammer" logo in such a way as to make it unreadable. Below, the title of the book was scrawled several times in a hand so shaky, it looked as if Ralph Steadman had tried to pen it while drunk. And when I turned to the back cover, I found the following:

"In a castle as grey and jagged as the mountains around it... Detlef Sierck, the greatest playwright and impresario in the Warhammer world, is to recreate on stage the death of Drachenfels."

The greatest - playwright?

I checked inside. Sure enough, it was a book about the staging of a play. There was some court intrigue, a lot of elegant little quips and Victorian mannerisms - it was like an Old English drawing-room comedy.

What the hell? Were David Pringle's literary ethics so powerfully entrenched, he'd commissioned a novel in which there weren't any swordsmen, goblins, or trolls at all?

I went back to my Warhammer rule books. They contained stirring scenesetting passages such as:

"Many sink into an abyss of despair, mindlessly running and gibbering with the warped and unnameable beasts of the Chaos Pack. Their fate is a minor mercy, for with mindlessness comes oblivion. Some arise as dreaded and terrible Chaos Lords, the leaders of the Chaos Beastmen that slaughter and rampage across the Wastes and beyond."

Yeah, that was the stuff I understood, squarely targeted at repressed fourteen-year-olds with twisted power fantasies. I understood their primitive yearnings; I'd been like that myself, once. These were my kind of people! I had been writing my own novel with them in mind.

But now, with my book almost finished, here was this droll, mannered little farce by Kim Newman about a bunch of noblemen staging a play. And it was the first in the series, setting the tone for all that would follow.

In a spirit of numb confusion, I finished my manuscript and turned it in.

Weeks passed. When I realized that my editor was taking longer to read my novel than it had taken me to write it, I started to fear the worst. Eventually, the worst was confirmed by my literary agent: "He doesn't much like your book and he doesn't know what to do about it."

**T**hus do we learn humility. After writing thirty-five books over the past twenty-odd years without a single rejection, my comeuppance had finally come up. And the opus that turned out to be my nemesis was, of

all things, a Warhammer novel - deemed unsuitable probably because it wasn't "literary" enough. Well, I had to laugh.

Of course, I would have been laughing a little louder if I'd received more than just £1,000 of my £10,000 - the grail that had motivated me through so many dark, desperate hours studying maps, monsters, and other half-baked, second-rate concepts. But there's rough justice here, isn't there? Lured by a lump of easy money, Platt attempts to betray his most strongly held, widely self-publicized principles regarding fantasy literature - and fails!

Of course, I still think that my concept of an action-packed novel for Warhammer readers makes more sense than a drawing-room comedy about the staging of a medieval play. And I suspect that any editor who thinks he can preserve some literary ethics while commissioning Warhammer novels is liable to find himself faced with disastrous sales figures and a sadder, wiser, meaner, hungrier publisher who suddenly feels disinclined to follow through with his promised largesse. I imagine unexpected payment delays, law suits, maybe even physical violence as a small but courageous horde of hack writers rise up against the monstrous beasts of chaotic game-publishing, yelling for the pieces of silver that they once were promised for their toil.

But I suppose this sounds a bit self-serving, under the circumstances, so I'll try to keep an open mind and wait and see, and in the meantime I remain, as ever, your faithful columnist, humbled but daunted... by yet another failed attempt to get fairly rich, fairly quick.

(Charles Platt)

**David Pringle replies:** I just want to put Charles Platt straight on one small point. Kim Newman did in fact give permission for "Jack Yeovil's" true identity to be revealed in the pages of *White Dwarf*, *Interzone* and elsewhere. For other opinions as to the merits of Kim's fantasy novel, *Drachenfels*, I refer any interested readers to the review by John Clute which appeared in *I2* 35 and to the profile of Kim by Roz Kaveney which appears in this issue. In reply to Charles's wider points, **Tom Kirby** of Games Workshop Design Studio, Nottingham, wishes to say the following:

"It's sad, but Charles obviously didn't take the whole business of producing a novel for us seriously. It's clear from the material he submitted he didn't read or take the background seriously, which is of course one of the main reasons the book was rejected.

"Role-playing is a wonderful, rich hobby, and in the UK it has over 200,000 dedicated adherents. These

Concluded on page 72

# The Braining of Mother Lamprey

## Simon D. Ings

**I**t was a cold morning, two days before Jape Day, and little children were eating the eyeballs of corpses in Blood Park. Ashura the apprentice cycled past the onlookers and the hawkers selling sweetmeats, alive to the wind in his face and the vibration of the bike beneath his body. It was a wonderful day to be alive in this of all cities, and Ashura smiled into the sunlight that dappled the narrow street.

He rounded a corner into Grapé Street, where the vintners held court, readying themselves for the coming festivities. He dismounted and pushed his bike past the steaming chutes and the open cess-run at the centre of the road, dazzled by the coloured light reflected from shop windows.

It had rained that night, and the cobblestones were slick with a greenish slime, exuded as if from the pores of the rock itself: a characteristic of the streets of GodGate. Ashura slid and slipped and skipped along, lifting the heavy frame of his bike as he crossed the open sewer, and made for the end of the run of shops. In a narrow doorway shadowed by bird-nested eaves he paused and rummaged in his breeches pocket for the rusty key.

In the shadow cast by a casement window high up in the peach-plastered building, half a dozen street urchins were making a pile of their turds. They moved and squatted with cat-like gestures and their sharp, wet teeth flashed when they laughed.

Ashura's fingers found the key. He pushed the door open and entered, pulling his bicycle in after him. He leaned it against a banister-rail and clattered up the rickety staircase. At the top he knocked, then waited respectfully.

**E**nter," came a querulous, age-cracked voice. Half-cringeing, Ashura opened the door. It squealed on dry hinges. His master stood within, head cocked like some huge carrion-bird to watch the entrant. Beady-eyed and ancient, he stood in robes that were more for protection from the chill than for reasons of tradition. There was a pallor to him today, a strange pastiness to his much-wrinkled flesh. Ashura ascribed it to the warlock's recent diet of chaffinch brains.

"Did you fetch it?" he demanded of Ashura.

Ashura nodded to his master, almost bowing. "I did, sir." He held it in his capacious pocket, a stoneware jar capped by a thick pitch seal; a jar just large enough to hold something disquieting. His hand shook as he held it out at arm's length, proffering it to the master.

The old man whipped out a hand with surprising agility and snatched the jar from him, as if he feared Ashura would drop it. For his part, the apprentice breathed a sigh of relief. He hoped that Master Urkhan would let him leave before he put it to use; to some things he had no wish to be apprenticed.

There was a rattle and a clatter from the yard. Urkhan whirled and tottered to the window. "Look at that!" he screeched, with a voice like an ungreased fiddle bow.

Ashura winced. Dutiful, he approached the window. Someone or something had knocked over Urkhan's capacious rubbish bin. Feathers blew about the yard. Little bird bones lay strewn in a heap over the cobbles. "Babies! Ferals! No-goods!" the warlock shouted. "We should make the Blood Park fence twenty-foot high!"

He turned from the window and twittered. Straight away Ashura felt a vicious itch behind his eyes: Urkhan had placed wards on the room when he first arrived at this city. It was unpleasant; Ashura drew away from his master hastily. Urkhan stopped twittering and the itch subsided. The window at which they stood shook in its frame as a ward passed through it on its way to clear up the mess.

"Ee, it has taken long enough," said the master, rubbing the pot Ashura had given him with a parched hand. He glanced at the boy with sly, squinting eyes. "An' did you tell him as I said?" There was menace in his voice.

"I did," said Ashura, stonily. "He told me it was best raw with lemon."

His master ran a pale tongue over crumpled lips. He walked across the room as if his old bones ached, cradling the small pot. Beneath the stuffed alligator and the bronze orrery that hung, verdigris-stained, from the rafters, he paused and placed the pot at the fulcrum of a strange ideogram inscribed on the floor in wax melted from a red candle. Ashura cleared his throat.

"What is it now?" said Urkhan, tetchily. "Have you not —"

"If it please you, Master, I have not slept since yesterday night. Might I have leave...?"

"Yes, yes, begone at once. I have work to do..." The master brushed him away with a flapping motion of his hands as he concentrated. Ashura, knowing his luck to be in, made for the door as silently as he could and pulled it to behind him. The master would expect him back as soon as his business was concluded.

Ashura broke into a cold sweat at the thought. Truly

Urkhan is puissant, he thought, but I want none of it at such a price! Still, the day was young and the master would be busy for hours yet – time to do as a young apprentice would.

**O**utdoors it was still cold, but now the chill was welcome. He passed his bike and walked out into Grape Street.

The urchins squatted around the pile they had made, and one of them pressed something pale and blood-stained into the writhing dung. A stiff breeze blew across the street, carrying with it feathers and flecks of down.

Soon enough, the excrement shuddered and bubbled. The urchins drew back. A blackish, segmented thing flapped free of the quivering mass and swooped up into the rectangle of sunshine visible between the houses. It hovered there, taking form, shaping itself around the bones of the salvaged chaffinch skeleton with greater and greater facility. The crude flaps of its wings sheened in the light and blossomed with rainbow colours. It made tentative, fart-like noise and was gone. The urchins' whoops of delight echoed in his ears as Ashura made his way down the chilly thoroughfare. He grinned and shook his head. Kids!

He sobered when he saw the mourning party, traversing the central square. They wore cheap cloth of traditional green and carried kitchenware – pots, ladles and knives – all burnished to a high sheen. Poor people, making much of the death of one of their number. Now, who would command that kind of attention?

He turned up a side-street, keeping to leeward of the central sluice. Ahead he saw a party of cessbeaters.

"Ashura!"

He cast a cautious eye over the three men. Some of his old comrades had never got over their jealousy at his recently acquired status of Warlock's apprentice. He was sure to have a rough time at their hands on Jape Day, if not before...

"Ashura!"

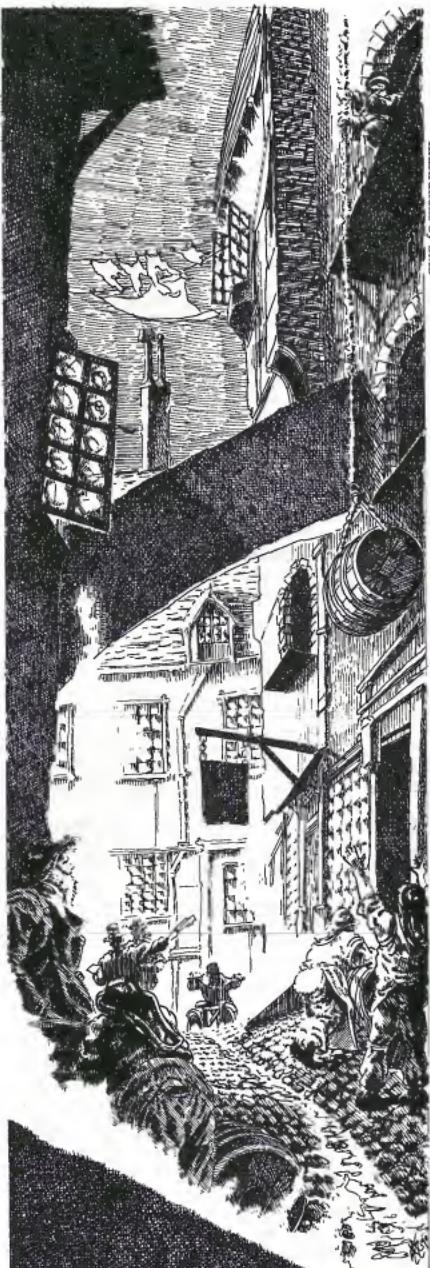
The voice was familiar. Belatedly, he recognized Culpole. He grinned and walked over.

Culpole and his colleagues were covered head to foot in excrement. It writhed over their gloved hands and jerkins, groping blindly for new form. Where it touched skin, though, it withered and fell. Cessbeaters regularly smeared themselves with a charmed ointment made to quell rotten matter's zest for life. They dipped their hazel brushes in a similar ointment and swept the walls of the sluices with it. This retarded the foul matter's growth till it was well past city boundaries.

"Still no patron, Culpole?" Culpole was a would-be poet. When they were children, just past the feral period, Ashura talked spells and enchantments while Culpole murmured softer, more subtle magics. It seemed for a long time that Culpole would be the more successful of the two. It hadn't worked out that way, but their friendship was as strong as ever.

Culpole shook his head sadly. "I had great hopes of Frenklyn the Steward, but he wanted favours other than words from me. They say his sperm is so potent he has made men pregnant."

Ashura sighed. "You were wise to think better of that alliance. Tell me, who's the funeral party for?"



"Mother Lamprey," another cessbeater replied.

"The oracle?"

"The one," the stranger replied. "Someone threw a pot out a window as she stepped into her alley. Brained her dead."

Culpole shook his head. "I'd have thought it would take more than crockery to dash the brains of Mother Lamprey. She was a wise one."

"Life was hot within her," affirmed the stranger. "When she walked past Blood Park they say flowers bloomed in dead men's groins."

"And Mother Runnell?" Ashura enquired.

"She's in mourning, naturally," Culpole replied. "Last I heard she was silent at the funeral and left the feasts early. She's taken it bad."

Ashura glanced up at the sun. Just enough time left to investigate. "Look, Culpole, I'll catch you later. I must run."

He walked off, somewhat guiltily; he shouldn't have left Culpole like that, so hurriedly. Culpole had been close to Mother Lamprey, and it was ill-luck that his duties as cessbeater had kept him from the hanging and the wake. Ashura well remembered how Culpole used to pass on stories she told him about the Old Time, when the tide of things was still turned to dying and Science held sway.

Ashura thought of the scientists he had seen wandering the city — pathetic creatures full of half-remembered schemata and faked ritual, their ludicrous labcoats torn and crammed with totemic pens, their heads filled with some gibberish called mathematics.

Respect them, Mother Lamprey had said to him and Culpole once, when their post-feral laughter rose too high and cruel at her description of them. "They walk the paths of the dying at a time of bloom; their systems are misplaced. But come the next millennium and their time will have come again. Then our broomsticks and elixirs will be as risible to the good folk of the world as their mechanics are now." Wise old woman. Strong old woman. Dead? Strange...

**F**oxtongue was leaning against the entrance to the Walking Eye tavern. Her shirt was open; her tender breasts and her child-swollen stomach glowed in the sun as if they would melt the cotton around them. Ashura caught his breath and strode over to her.

"I came as soon as I heard," he announced, hoping she'd take his blushes for signs of exhaustion and effort. By the wry look in her eyes there wasn't much hope of that.

"It's been a long time, Father-to-be." Her voice was like honey in climax.

He forgave her the sardonic remark instantly. "I... I'd like to see Mother Runnell."

She smiled and led him through the tavern. It was nearly empty, Ashura noticed; the regulars must all be at the funeral feast. Round the back of the inn, in a brick yard thick with dust and weeds, sat the shawled bulk of Mother Runnell. She turned rheumy eyes to meet him. She did not smile and, even given the present circumstances, he found that disconcerting.

"Foxtongue, leave us. Go mend your Jape Day dress or something," she commanded, and there was an

edge to her voice Ashura hadn't heard before. Foxtongue flounced back into the inn, causing Ashura a final pang.

"And so," the oracle said, observing him through clouded green eyes. The silence stretched. In spite of himself, Ashura found himself surveying her huge bulk.

Mother Runnell had been pregnant with the same child for some twenty-eight years. It was nowhere near adult size — more the size of a feral. Nonetheless, it made an impressive addition to the woman's natural bulk.

Mother Runnell was that rare phenomenon, an oracle; a permanently pregnant seer. The townsfolk came and told her stories, rumours, gossip, opinions — and Mother Runnell passed the messages on in her blood to her ever-underdeveloped child. The child in turn would mull over the flavours of the world outside, and dance in Mother Runnell the likely outcome. Mother Runnell and her fleshy charge could not predict major events, but they could predict people's fortunes with shivering accuracy.

"I don't want your condolence, Mite," she said at last.

Mite — his nickname as a post-feral, dropped in early adolescence and not heard since then. Ashura lowered his head. He'd stumbled upon some hurt, some worry. Quick of temper and of wit he might be. But life on the streets had told him well when to bite his tongue.

"You've chosen a strange course, Mite. I wish you were Mite once more, so you could choose again. You may well hang your head in shame."

"Not shame, Mother, puzzle —"

"Silence!" She'd meant it, presumably, to be an imperious command, but it came out tinged with hysteria and the weakness of an old woman. "You are a pander, a tool of evil work. We —" she stroked her belly — "cannot say whether you are aware of this, but we fear the worst."

"I keep my eyes open," said Ashura. "But I cannot see through locked doors, or closed minds."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning Master Urkhan is a wily, mischievous old bastard whose very eyes don't trust each other, hence the squint."

Mother Runnell grinned, very briefly, very warmly. Then the cold, worried mask was back. "So. Have you heard about Mother Lamprey's death?"

"That's why I'm here, to say I'm sorry..."

"Aaach," she snapped, "I didn't say, 'that she died,' I said 'about her death.' Of how she died, boy. Do you know how?"

"Brained by a pot."

"Have you any idea how tough old Lamprey was?"

"That... occurred to me, too. It must have been a damn large pot."

"You tell me. Neighbours saw the thing fall, that's all. Can't say after it hit that they gave it much thought."

Some reflex made Ashura glance up into the sky. He did a double-take. The clouds there were pink-edged. He was late. "Mother Runnell, I must go now."

"Your good master requiring more favours of your good will?"

"Well I am his apprentice."

"More deliveries?"

Ashura stood up and dusted himself down. "No doubt." The next second he was staring at her. "How, how..."

"What was in the pot, Ashura?" And all of a sudden Mother Runnell's eyes didn't seem bleared at all, but emerald and piercing.

"A dead ancient's brain," Ashura replied in a whisper.

"How do you know?"

Ashura looked at the ground, abashed. "I don't know. I didn't look, if that's what you mean. I can only surmise that's what it was from what I heard behind locked doors."

"Ahh," she said, and started rocking, back and forth, very slowly, "you do keep your eyes and ears open, young Mite, after all. I'm glad to hear it. Your life may depend on it, some day." Ashura shivered at the pronouncement but the oracle's smile was warm. "Now come, tell me, what was the brain for?"

"Master Urkhan's old wards are wearing down. He made them from squirrel and cat and other small animals. He's made new ones from chaffinches, but he hasn't used any of them. I think he's after something a little stronger."

"A ward from the *ka* of a dead man?"

Ashura nodded, blushing.

Mother Runnell tutted. "Oh, Mite, what have you got yourself involved in? You know that's a restricted practice. If the burghers heard... Who provided the brain?"

"Trimghoul."

"The psychokine?"

"The same."

"And where did he get it?"

"From Blood Park, so he said."

"And do you really believe him, Ashura?" Ashura, his correct name. Seriousness. Mother Runnell questions were in deadly earnest.

Did he believe Trimghoul? He thought of the man, astride his skittish gelding and shrouded in his habitual garb, an unnerving costume of black net that covered him from head to foot. Things started slotting into place inside Ashura's head, forming a pattern he didn't much care for – not at all.

His tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth. "What must I do?" he stammered.

"Act upon your suspicions," she replied simply. "That's not so hard, is it?" Something cold slithered down Ashura's spine.

**F**oxtongue was waiting inside. She was sitting on a rough oak table, her feet up on a stool. Ashura gave her a worried smile as he made for the door.

"No time to show me a trick or two, Warlock?"

"Fraid not," he shrugged.

"Do you fear your master's scolding that much?"

Yes, something screamed at him. Yes. But Ashura sensed that whatever displeasure he might encounter by arriving late this afternoon, it was as nothing to the roasting he might suffer should he follow Mother Runnell's advice, as he knew he must.

So he went back to the table where Foxtongue sat and with an unconvincing attempt at a jaunty smile he stroked up the material of her dress, lifted her leg

and kissed her calf. And as if she knew, and maybe she did, how he needed someone then, how afraid he really was, she lifted her skirts for him.

**L**ate that night, with the moon full and lime green through his window, Ashura got out of bed and began to dress. He bound his feet in leather thongs, then pulled on stout boots. He slipped on a jacket made from oiled canvas. It was worn and not as tough as he would have liked, but it was all he had. He tied polished black chaps around his trousers. He had bought them to impress womenfolk. Tonight, they would serve a more practical purpose. Life, new form, it was an infection here, and of course the children carried it. Life was strong in them.

He went to the sink and armed himself with a razor. He padded down the stairs, careful not to wake the other sleepers in the tenement. He did not take his bicycle, but trotted light-footed towards the dark centre of the city, and Blood Park.

Decorations had been hung over the city's main thoroughfare in preparation for the Jape Day festival. Immense jointed papier-mâché heads painted in clown's colours rocked in their wire cradles, sending shadows scudding across the moonlit street. They grinned at him, and Ashura shuddered. They winked and squealed their wire hinges. The red paint around their full lips was black in the moonlight, and gave to the line of each huge mouth a skeletal spareness. Their jaws swung open and closed. A row of bats clung to the lips of one, till a sudden gust swung the gaping, star-filled maw shut with a hollow, wooden concussion. The bats fled and plummeted into a side-alley.

The houses which fronted the flagstoned alley bulged like the buds of unnaturally huge flowers, or the pregnant bellies of giants. Timber balks two storeys up held the walls apart; flags and bright streamers covered the dark timber, only now they were colourless and tatty in the pitiless light. They wove about themselves with undersea slowness, like stranded things.

For comfort, Ashura thought back to former festivals. The memories were child-like, unclouded by the shadow of Urkhan. On Jape Day young girls earned pennies setting trip-wires across the streets. In the hours before dawn they suspended buckets of water and powder dye and paint in ingenious, thoroughly insecure harnesses between the rooftops of this most ancient and fertile of cities – and this was but the beginning.

Throughout the day townsfolk set trap after trap, large and small, for their fellows. Ashura's street came together to nail the contents of a grandee's mansion to its sun-baked roof. At lunchtime, someone sent an intricate clockwork spider marching up his trousers. Ashura responded by slipping a tight-wound elastic snake beneath a councillor's travelling blanket as he watched the city's navvies dismantle an iron bridge. Ashura followed the workmen when they took the girders away, and watched them rebuild it so it strung together the houses of notorious rivals.

In the evening, trouvères played the lute, jesters juggled flaming brands, grinning crones sold nosegays for tuppence and witches and warlocks demonstrated their arts in night-long shows of tricks, fireworks, curiosities and miracles....

But not Urkhan.

Not Urkhan, not this year, and Ashura feared to know why.

The gate and fence of Blood Park were guarded night and day to prevent errant wizards from practising restricted arts. He, a wizard's apprentice, had no choice but to enter Blood Park surreptitiously by the section of fence furthest from the gallows and least carefully patrolled.

They had given Mother Lamprey the funeral rites of an ancient as a mark of respect. He could see from a distance feral children swinging on the fresh rope.

He climbed up the high barbed fence walling in the bodies of the city's dead.

Nothing died in the city, not without a struggle. Mother Lamprey had explained it to him once.

GodGate was the nub, the centre, the very place where the world's change from death to bloom had begun. God himself, who had grown feeble during the Age of Science, had been reborn in this city, bringing in the new Age of Wizardry. According to Mother Lamprey, God was a woman now, Earth Mother, fecund and savage. Her influence was manifold – in the way the very leavings and excrement of the city would sprout and run riot if left untended, in the way a man's sperm could breed new forms not just in women, but in other men, even in animals (centaurs had terrorized the city's womenfolk that spring); and in the way the children of the city were born feral and self-sufficient, leaving their mothers' milk for lovers to suck away while they fought other children in hideous, bloody battles of selection.

For safety's sake the townsfolk threw their savage and bloodthirsty newborns into the Park and let them feast and grow on the richly flavoured corpses of ancients, securely contained behind high fences.

It took intelligence, teamwork and patience to scale from the inside the ugly, curving spears of the Blood Park fence. You couldn't climb it until you were tall, patient and could collaborate with others.

One night Culpole and Ashura had resisted the temptation to attack each other, had instead helped each other escape to the outside. They had joined the adult world together.

Ashura dropped down, felt his boots squish and slide on loose flesh. He heard the patter of tiny, lethal feet. He would use his blade if he had to, certain that he wouldn't kill anything. Nothing short of dismemberment could kill a feral for good. A slashed face or stomach, however, would give him time to escape an attacker. His eyes had adjusted to the light. He could see faint objects stir in the chaos of limb, torso and skull. He walked carefully towards the gallows.

There was the slightest hint of corruption to the air. In past times, Mother Lamprey had said, the scent of such places was so strong as to be unbearable, and dread plagues brought death to anyone who ventured near. Even the fresh aroma of excrement was tainted and vile in those times, and carried sickness. The thought threatened to turn his stomach.

He was brought up short by twin green sparks near his feet. He was by the corpse of an old woman. Her breasts had creamed and had melted through the lattice of her chest. Her head was missing. Again the flash. A baby peered through the bars of her ribs. Teeth gleamed. Then it flung itself back, scrambled away

across the carnage. Claws flung shreds of flesh skywards as it fled.

Ashura reached the funeral gallows without further incident. The area was clear and tended. He looked with yearning at the tidy gravel path leading to the main gate.

It had taken him twenty minutes to get this far. By the main gate it would have taken a mere two, and it would have been a lot safer.

The feral children who had played on the rope were nowhere to be seen. He approached the gallows and caught on the night air the metallic tang of fresh blood. She lay in a pool of intestine and fluid on the far side of the platform. Her stomach was laid open. Her half-consumed foetus glistened in the light. Ashura bent his head in funeral meditation, and did his best to ignore the saliva that was filling his mouth. The smell was delicious. He closed his eyes.

Something scrawled towards him, was on him, was tearing at the too-thin sleeve of his jerkin, and he was pivoting, taking the child off its feet, reaching for his razor. The child dug its claws in. With sickening slowness, Ashura felt a single barb of chitin penetrate the flesh of his arm. Then the blade was out and buried in his attacker's mouth.

The girl gurgled and chewed on the tempered steel, released her grip. He could feel new tissue encircle and entrap the blade. He yanked it free only with difficulty. Blood fountained from her mouth as she scampered away.

By the time she calmed down enough to feel pain, her mouth would have healed. Ashura had left that happy time behind. His arm would take weeks to heal. And it hurt like hell.

He dropped the knife. It rang against Mother Lamprey's skull.

His stomach jolted up into his mouth. It rang?

He knelt down, rapped at the old woman's bald head, lifted it up to test its weight, then turned it and used a finger to probe behind the eyeball.

Mother Lamprey's skull was empty.

**H**e was woken the next morning by a stinging sensation in his arm. He undid the crude dressing he had strapped to the wound the night before and gazed dumbfounded at the curl of gristle that was a baby's ear, sprouting smoothly from the surface of his skin. Blood rushed through his head; he felt his face suffused with heat. This could spread. Cancer. Malformation. His whole arm taken up with a child's face, eyes, a – a mouth.

Ashura reached the sink barely in time to save the polished floor from his vomit. It blossomed and quivered with identity and he had to beat it down the plughole with a flannel, then boil a kettle and chase it with the water through the crude copper pipe. Its screams were terrible.

He leaned up against the basin, shivering. The ear on his arm twitched.

Ashura staggered back to his bed and laid his head in his hands. "This isn't happening," he told himself, and wished he could believe his words.

It wasn't as if such things were unheard of. They were. They were easily dealt with, too. All you had to do was have it removed by a psychokine. Who was GodGate's psychokine? Trimghoul. Who stole Mother

Lamprey's brain? Trimghoul. Who would know precisely what Ashura had been up to if he revealed the ear on his forearm?

Trimghoul.

**T**rimghoul the psychokine lived on the outskirts of the city, in an expensive villa tended by many burly servants. He was a recluse, and a hypochondriac. He rarely ventured abroad, and when he did so, he wore a beekeeper's hat with a long, black veil, long gloves of grey cotton and a sable top-coat with silver edging, which he never removed, no matter the fineness of the weather. Folk who had visited him spoke of elaborate and intimate searches of their belongings and their person prior to the audience, and of the unbearable closeness of his apartments, of windows nailed shut and waxed to keep out draughts, or glassless and screened by tight muslin cloths.

Ashura walked up the gravel drive, nodding soberly to the men whose task it was to pour gallon after gallon of expensive, bewitched insecticide onto the garden shrubs. Ashura shivered. Trimghoul's wealth had always disturbed him. Now it scared him, for he had begun to wonder whence that wealth had originated.

He stepped into the shade of an ornate iron-worked portico and reached for the heavy brass knocker, fashioned in the shape of a human jawbone.

A balding man with bright, blue eyes, lips too full for such a jowl-ridden jaw and hands that knew no manners, searched him, stripped him of his coat and outer shoes and trussed him up in a clean white apron. Trimghoul was in his study. There were no porters or butlers beyond the portico, and the house was never locked. It was a sign of Trimghoul's power. Who could harm a man who could control objects at a distance? It would take the brute force of a dozen or more to overcome him, if it came to it.

Ashura knocked on the door.

"Come." That cultured, masterful voice. No wonder Trimghoul, for all his eccentricity, was a favourite among the ladies of the region.

Ashura opened the door. Trimghoul's face was beautiful in the way that all frail-boned, high-cheeked men are beautiful – delicate in feature but strong in poise. He wore a high collar and a sober black suit.

By contrast, his only other exposed flesh – his hands and wrists – were covered in hair, gnarled and powerful-looking, and his gait was stooped and awkward, as if he found it much more comfortable to bend his knees the opposite way. Ashura had never seen Trimghoul en *deshabillé*, but, from what he had heard, Trimghoul's face was the most human thing about him. The rest of him brought to mind the disturbing eroticism of satyrs.

True to report, a fire burned savagely behind an iron grate. The heat was barely tolerable. Ashura felt his forehead and cheeks prick with moisture.

"Ah, young 'prentice. More requests from my old friend Urkhan?"

"N-no. Actually, I wonder if you can help me." Ashura blushed.

Trimghoul misinterpreted the redness in the boy's cheeks. "Ah," he said, wisely. "Woman trouble, eh? Well, it happens to the best of us. Got a would-be oracle pregnant before her time, I suppose? Well, send



her along, no need to act all blushing, we're men of the world old chap, eh?" He chuckled. His teeth were very small, and were all exactly alike... "I'll dump her child on some ape or big cat and send it to a circus. For the usual fee, of course."

Trimghoul specialized in the production of carnival curios and hybrid pets for wealthy ladies of the region. There existed a harmless rivalry between these ladies, which found expression not only in their dress, their jewels, and (at the more permissive venues) their adjudged skill in performance with centaurs, but also in what pets they possessed.

Be it an animal out of legend – a Square Woolly Pig, say – or a wild, modern scherzo in dachshund, peacock and halibut, a Trimghoulian pet was the sine qua non of GodGate's polite society.

Such psychokinetic trivia were the source of Trimghoul's considerable social popularity; they were also the hook from which he hung his amatory successes. Trimghoul's dalliance with the womenfolk was due as much to his risqué payment methods, as to the more conventional tools of seduction.

"That's not the problem," Ashura admitted. The ear twitched on his forearm.

"Well, come along, out with it, glad to help a young man with ambition." A fly landed on Trimghoul's forehead. It sparked and vanished. A little red place on the psychokine's forehead remained. He stared around him with a fierce expression. "How in hell's name did that get in here? Were you cleaned?"

"Y-yes!" Ashura stepped back, startled by Trimghoul's fierce expression.

A second, and all anger was gone. Trimghoul's face was its even, bronzed hue once more. "Come now, my boy."

Ashura took a deep breath – and drew up the sleeve of his shirt.

Trimghoul stared at Ashura's forearm. His expression was severe.

"Tell me you were delivering a baby and it scratched you."

"Yes, I..."

"Now tell me the truth."

"Please get it off me," Ashura begged.

Trimghoul looked deep into his eyes. The red mark on his forehead was still there. His pupils were black, dilated, huge.

"Please," Ashura whispered.

Trimghoul sniffed, glanced at Ashura's arm. There was a tiny flash, heat burst on his skin. Ashura looked down. The ear was gone as if it had never been.

"Do you want to know where I put it?" Trimghoul's voice was cold and soft.

Ashura said nothing. He stared at his arm and waited for what might follow.

"I placed it on the forehead of a young boy known throughout the city for snooping and prying and getting in people's way."

Instinctively, Ashura brought his hand up to his face, but there was nothing there.

Trimghoul sighed and turned away from him to stare out the window at the city. "Oh dear, young man, you are an open book. Why do young boys get themselves in scrapes like this if they cannot dissemble to their elders? You were playing with corpses in Blood Park last night, yes?"

"Yes," Ashura dropped his gaze to the floor.

"And what did you find?"

Ashura's fists clenched. He tightened what resolve he had and said, "You killed Mother Lamprey."

Trimghoul whirled round. His face was twisted in a red mask of bestial fury. A blast of light seared Ashura's face. "Don't cross me, tyke. I could rip out your balls and eyes and juggle them in front of your face without even blinking. And who's to say I'd put them back in quite the same places?" He spat and turned away. "Get out of my sight." He scratched at the sore place on his forehead.

Ashura felt a line of blood trickle down his cheek. He turned and ran.

**B**ack in his room, Ashura stared at his reflection in the mirror above the sink. Trimghoul had shaved one side of his head, nicking it in several places. He thought of the fly, of the sore place that was left on Trimghoul's forehead when he made the fly vanish. A hasty or unconscious performance of his art left crude results, obviously.

Ashura ran his hand over the shaved side of his head. It was not the most even cut of his life. Ashura tried to grin at the thought but his reflection sent back a wan death-mask in reply.

There came a knock at his door. It was Culpole. He stood ashen-faced, trembling, cap stretched to tearing between his hands. "Ashura, come quick, there's –" He noticed Ashura's shaven scalp. "But what happened to you – no matter, follow me." He made to say more, but thought better of it, turned and strode down the echoing hallway, kicking dust from the bare, warped boards as he went. "Come on!" he called, urgency cracking his voice.

Ashura grabbed his coat and hurried after his friend. "What is it?" The stairs clattered and shook as they hurried down.

"Foxtongue's had her leg taken off by the wheel of a fairground float." Ashura stared aghast at Culpole's harassed profile as they traversed the little square towards the Walking Eye Tavern. "She was out buying curried sweets for Jape Day. She had a fainting fit, her foot slipped on a cobble... the ruts on the street are deep; they're sharp too. The wheel, it scissored her bone clean through."

Cold sweat tickled Ashura's back. "She's lost her leg?"

Culpole nodded, and coughed. "Above the knee, my friend."

Ashura let out a moan; his stride faltered and sagged. "Her leg?"

Culpole nodded. He turned to his stricken comrade. "Ashura," he said. "We'll catch it. It can't have gone far. Cess-beaters know the city backwards." He took Ashura's hand and squeezed it. "We'll find your bedmate's limb in time. Trust me."

**F**oxtongue lay in the dip of Mother Runnell's capacious bed at the Walking Eye. She was only half-conscious – Culpole had mixed her a sleeping draught – but the pain was still there. It came in waves, and her face distorted in a rictus of agony as she passed from one moment of slurred somnolence to the next. Ashura sat at the head of the bed and brushed the damp chestnut hair from her face.

"Ashura?" she whispered through dry lips. He wetted them with his mouth. Her breath was shallow and fetid. "Ashura, how long?"

Ashura glanced at Culpole. Culpole held up three fingers straight, and one bent at the knuckle.

"It's been on the hop for under four hours," Ashura told her.

Foxtongue set her jaw. Her eyes bored a challenge into Ashura's own. "How much time do I have?"

Ashura took a deep, ragged breath and pulled back the linen which covered Foxtongue from the waist down. Mother Runnell had wisely prepared a dung dressing. The wound was sealed, and the excrement was parchment-tough where it closed off the stump. Around the edges, the transformed waste matter had adopted the consistency and pallor of untanned skin. Tough black hairs stubbled the line of the join. Lymph and blood had stained the sheets, but a little weeping from the wound was to be expected.

Foxtongue howled with pain when Ashura touched a finger-tip to the dressing. He whispered apologies in her ear and kissed it. "What happened to you?" he said.

"I — I felt ill, faint, as if something had got between me and my eyes, and I just... I just..." Pain and fear swelled her eyes with tears.

Ashura put a comforting hand on her swollen belly.

A static shock flung him from the bed. He stumbled and fell back against Culpole, and they went sprawling. Culpole scrambled up, his eyes wide in shock, and helped Ashura up. "It's a ward," Ashura muttered. "There's a ward in my child."

He went back to the bed and laid his hand more carefully upon Foxtongue's belly. He looked at her, wondering what to say, but she had slipped into fitful half-consciousness.

There! In his head, a vicious twitching, a scraping sensation behind the eyeballs...

He felt his jaw tighten in confusion and anger. He forced his mouth to relax, pursed his lips and twirled. Culpole stared at him and, overcome by the tension of the moment, laughed out loud. Ashura motioned impatiently for him to be silent. There! A response from the ward hidden in his lover, a scrabbling under his hand. Claws, the tickle of feathers. The whisper of a little birdy brain. It repeated one message, over and over again, swirling it around and back in an unending, numbing syncope...

"Well, what is it?" Culpole took Ashura's shoulder.

Ashura shook his head and blinked. He stared about him as if he had just awoken in a strange room. "Passing husks is hell," he said.

"What?"

Ashura caught sight of Foxtongue, and revived. "It's a ward made out of a chaffinch," he said. "What's more I can guess whose chaffinch."

Foxtongue stirred and came awake once more, panting with pain.

A commotion outside the door silenced them.

"Get — grab it, man!"

"Ach! The bloody thing went and..."

"Right behind the... HOLD IT STILL!"

"The door! The door!"

"Ee dee dee, dee ee..."

"Cag the little..."

"OPEN THE BLOODY DOOR!"

Culpole sprang to the latch, unfastened it, and went flying again as four burly cessbeaters, covered from head to toe in the stuff of their trade were pulled through the door by a pole of savage, straining flesh — Foxtongue's leg.

"Dee," it sang, "Ee dee dee." It pulled free of its captors and leapt aboard the bed. It pressed its needle-toothed stump to Foxtongue's cheek in a passionate kiss. "Dee! ee dee!" It nuzzled her breast.

Foxtongue grinned, but a sudden stab of pain from her stump turned the expression inside out.

A polite cough from the doorway made Ashura turn. It was Master Paragrat, one-time blacksmith, now warlock extraordinary and a fine physician. "I came as soon as I heard," he announced in a rich rural baritone. His firm, dimpled jaw was hidden by a false white beard, which he sported for reasons of tradition. His eyes were a glistening hazelnut. Over his symbol-strewn wizard's gown he wore an old leather apron. "I was setting up the fireworks for Jape Day." Ashura bowed and saw that the wizard's heavy boots were spattered with mud and flecks of grass from trudging the High Meadows.

"Aha! The limb, splendid." Paragrat drew himself up to his full height, stared imperiously at the leg, and uttered something in an outlandish tongue. The leg turned, blinking tiny primitive eyes placed just below the knee joint. It hopped down from the bed and stood before them. Paragrat knelt down and examined it. He raised his head and spoke to Foxtongue. "You're in luck, Missee; you're young, your flesh tends strongly towards life. Your leg'll live for at least another two days. But it's strong-willed, like a feral. It enjoys its independence, anyone can see that."

He studied the limb. "Let's see, it's already got itself a sense of balance, eyes, even a mouth, and a tongue." He sighed and shook his head. A mop of black hair fell across his eyes and he swept it away with a gnarled, full-muscled hand. "It's changed too much. I can't web your leg back on for you. Only Trimghoul the psychokine can do that. Of course," Paragrat's eyes sparkled and he added, chuckling, "you mightn't think that so bad..."

Ashura groaned and slumped down on the bed. Paragrat turned to him. "What's up?"

"Touch her belly, sir."

Foxtongue nodded assent and Paragrat pressed his hand to her flesh. His arm tensed. His eyes grew wide. "My arse is sore," he whimpered — a strange, fluting falsetto — "passing husks is... Wait!"

He pulled away abruptly and stared at Ashura. "This —" He coughed, clearing his mouth of strangeness. "— is the third woman I've seen today with such a thing in her belly. What do you know of this?"

"They're chaffinch wards," Ashura said. "My master made them."

"And who might he be?"

"Urkhan."

Paragrat growled. "That wily old... what else do you know?"

"I know that Trimghoul stole the brain of Mother Lamprey, an oracle round these parts, and gave it to Urkhan."

"What?"

"To eat."

"No!" Paragrat seized his arm and pulled him from

the bed. "Come on! We've no time to waste."

Ashura was out in the hall before he knew what was happening. "Take heart, Foxtongue!" he cried, and was then propelled at frightening speed down the steps of the Walking Eye tavern.

**A**s they ran, Ashura panted out his story. Soon enough, the whole sordid chain of events had been recounted. Paragrat bounded up the stairs four at a time. Ashura couldn't match the countryman's speed, and caught up with him just as he struck the door with a blow of his fist. Wood splintered and the door shuddered open with an agonized squeal. Ashura's eyes widened.

Urkhan stood by the window, resplendent in a low-cut blue ball gown. Pearls hung about his wrinkled neck. His thin lips were pasted with thick red gloss. His sunken cheeks were rouged. His large, waxy ears were pierced; a diamond-studded ring was clipped through his right nostril. He glanced at them and covered his mouth with his fingers. His liver-spotted hands were adorned with rings and bracelets.

The room was full of old tea chests. There was not a single loose article in the room. Ashura's master was on the move.

He giggled. "Oh, not more presents, surely, oh he is such a generous patron, oh, do thank him, what is it this time?"

"Thank whom?" asked Paragrat, sweetly. Ashura just stared.

"Oh, that dear, dear man — why does he wear such silly black drapery? He's such a darling. Tell him I'm coming, I'm coming, I'm all ready. Where's the wagon, come, where's my coach?" Urkhan tottered towards them. His crabbed feet were strapped into ludicrous sequined high-heeled bootees. A stiletto caught in the gap between two floorboards; he twisted his ankle and with a cry he fell into Ashura's arms.

"Oh, you sweet boy..."

Ashura's spine screamed. His eyeballs shivered and exploded. His groin bloomed with a thousand strange erections, and he was inside the ward of Mother Lamprey and he saw a city, and it was GodGate, but not GodGate, and he saw people in the city, strangers, but somehow he recognized them, and he saw their lives, knew their friends, their likes and dislikes, their hurts and their fancies, and it was the whole story, and when Paragrat pulled him away, Ashura wept himself to sleep at the loss of it.

**W**hen Ashura came to, he found a couple of hours had passed, and it was late afternoon.

Urkhan was standing at the window, staring into the mellow, peach light. A beatific smile played upon his ragged, painted features.

Paragrat came and hunkered down beside the apprentice. "Urkhan's not strong enough to handle Mother Lamprey's ward properly," he said.

Ashura nodded, dumbly. Having touched it, he knew well the ward's power.

Paragrat flinched. "Ouch," he said.

A split second later Ashura felt it too, the fleeting passage of a little ward.

Ashura glanced round. "A chaffinch," he said.

"That's right. They come in through that window every minute or two. Guess where they go."

As if Paragrat's words were a cue, Urkhan stiffened and sighed.

Ashura stared and pointed with a shaking hand. "In... into him?"

"And now they're talking to each other," Paragrat finished for him. "The chaffinches are messengers. They talk to Mother Lamprey's ka. They tell her things. When I pulled Urkhan away from you — I sensed what they were doing, and I felt around for a while." He caught Ashura hurriedly wiping the tear stains from his cheeks. He grinned and hit the boy playfully, and painfully, on the shoulder. "I don't blame you for getting upset, lad. No shame in it. Old Lamprey's powerful. She's putting together a prediction to end all predictions. She's putting the whole city inside Urkhan's head."

Ashura shuddered. "The city, it's... not quite God-Gate."

Paragrat nodded. "It's a model. Unfinished. You know I told you I met other pregnant women with wards inside them today? Mother Lamprey's ka is using the chaffinches to talk to every unborn in the city." Paragrat's bony hand took Ashura's shoulder in a vice-like grip. Ashura gasped in pain. "It's like a hundred oracles put together," Paragrat went on. "Think of that computational power! Whoever owns that could be the despot of us all before the month's out!"

"You mean Urkhan?" Ashura queried, through clenched teeth. He wondered how his arm would fare, once Paragrat had pulled it off.

Paragrat shook his head impatiently and released the boy's shoulder. "No, lad, Trimghoul! Urkhan went and made himself a ward from Mother Lamprey and told it to model the city. Now it's all too much for him to handle. Look at him! His identity is all in a muddle, and I reckon Trimghoul's taking advantage of him. Maybe he even planned it that way. You heard what Urkhan said before he fell on you? If Urkhan cleaves to that man's side, we'll never hear more of him, and Trimghoul will have his own private key to the city's future! The town's womenfolk will be forever falling into fainting fits like wasps in October, and that damn pet-maker will have us all in his power!"

There was a clatter of horses' hooves outside the window. Urkhan peered down. He gave a little jump and whooped with delight.

"I'm coming! I'm coming, my love! Where shall we honeymoon? The Blue Mist Mountains or the Elysian coast? Oh, let it be the coast! We shall run barefoot across the bay and press our cheeks close to share the ocean-whisper of conch-shells! We shall tongue whelks drenched in lemon mouth-to-mouth as the sun draws down the jewelled night!" Urkhan performed a little dance, forgot about the shoes again and plummeted to the floor in a cacophony of jewellery. "Bugger!"

"Quick!" Paragrat cried, and leapt to his feet, dragging Ashura with him. "We mustn't be found here!" They scrambled down the stairs and out the back way, through the yard and into the alley.

"We'll meet at the Walking Eye," said Paragrat, "and plot our campaign. You go on. I have things to see to first."

Ashura nodded, still breathless from their flight, and set off down the road.

**B**y mid-evening, half the district was packed into the inn. Master Paragrat sat by the serving hatch. A sympathetic serving wench kept a pewter tankard filled with mead for him. He drank in quick, desperate gulps, without pleasure. His great, tousled head was hung in shame. "Nothing," he slurred. "Not one cursed thing I can do." At his feet were the books he had brought with him to study—manuals of arcane lore from which he had learned his craft—fine books scribed by wise men, but all of them inadequate to the task of ridding the city of a psychokine.

Earlier that evening, Paragrat had explained to Ashura and Mother Runnell what had proved to be an insurmountable problem.

"It's easy enough saying, 'spell Trimghoul,' but no spell is instantaneous. Think: he can move things at will, can make them vanish—*pft!*—or change them. As soon as he knows there's something up, he can rid himself of the source of enchantment. Meaning me. No, thank you. If on the other hand we use brute force, then I think we're all agreed Trimghoul is a spiteful shit. If you attacked him in sufficient numbers, and he knew he was finished, he wouldn't waste his limited powers on himself, oh no, he'd take those responsible with him to hell. He'd kill the city's oracles, most probably. And he may kill you, too," he said turning to Ashura, "or someone close to you. Foxtongue, say. Think about it."

Ashura thought about it. He didn't stop thinking about it.

Hours had passed since then. The inn was filled with disgruntled men and women. More and more of those women had to be helped into the back room, faint and ill from the attentions of Urkhan's chaffinch wards, and the men's tempers grew hot.

Mother Runnell sat atop the oak bar, turning her head this way and that, holding down the ugly mood of the place with an imperious frown.

At last, the events of the day—and most of all this senseless, brooding inaction—broke Ashura's patience. He left the inn, and while he walked towards his garret he racked his brains for some strategem. Paragrat was right. Conventional magic was out of the question. And you couldn't attack Trimghoul with brute force, either—he'd only kill innocents in his spite. Nor could you exactly sneak in to his house with a thin blade; at the first sight, or even snick, of a blade or wire or poison or anything else, he could remove it with barely conscious effort. Then woe betide the assassin!

Ashura glanced in at the shop windows as he walked. They were gaily decorated for Jape Day; it slowly dawned upon him that the yearly festival of tricks and cheats was but a night away. The garlands and brightly coloured paper decorations strewn across the street seemed out of place now and only depressed him further. He passed a shop. It was still open, and children were busy buying jokes and masks. He looked in at the articles on display. Fake spiders, beast costumes, rattles, waterguns...

He walked on, ran his fingers through his crudely shaved hair...and stopped dead. A strangled sound escaped his lips. He turned and retraced his steps.



“S o that's the plan,” he told Foxtongue, back to the Walking Eye. “It's ugly, it's degrading, and I've no right to ask you to do it. But if you're willing...”

Foxtongue gave him a sad sort of smile. She was sitting up in bed fully dressed, cuddling her leg. It purred contentedly and flexed.

The pain in her stump had lessened considerably and she was properly awake – and disturbed by the news from the inn.

“Your magic,” she said. “You're certain of it?”

Ashura shook his head. “I haven't come across a better idea, that's all.”

“Then that's good enough for me.”

Ashura's heart was in his throat. “Are you sure – I mean –”

“Give me the potion, Warlock.” She winked at him.

“Dee dee ee!” sang the leg.

Ashura handed her the little jar and turned to Culpole. “Get Paragrat to sober up, and once Foxtongue and I are back –” Ashura surreptitiously tapped the wood of the bedframe for luck “– wake a councillor or two and go pick Urkhan up from the mansion.”

Culpole nodded. “Off you go then. I'll be waiting for you. And Ashura – all the luck of the city, my friend.” They embraced.

**A**shura and Foxtongue stood on the hill overlooking Trimghoul's mansion. Ashura shifted the haversack on his back so its occupant couldn't kick him so hard, and took the jar from Foxtongue's palm. “Remember,” he said, demonstrating the workings of the jar as he spoke, “take the lid off and give Trimghoul the bracelet. You think that's the kind of payment he expects, and you're abashed when he tells you different...”

“Because I'm new to the town, yes. I'm not acquainted with that kind of thing.” She put on a ludicrous rustic accent. “I'm just a poor serving maid up from the country, sire.”

“Wait till he has fallen asleep. Then unclip the false bottom. I've jammed it with a little wax, see? So it won't spring up too hard. Sprinkle the stuff on the sheets and leave. Don't turn round, don't look back, and don't stop running.” He pressed the clip back, screwed the top back on, and slipped the jar back into the pocket of her cloak.

Foxtongue put her crutches to the ground and embraced him. “You know,” she said. “I'll think of you when I bed him, all the time. Promise.”

They kissed.

“I wonder what will happen to your little master,” she mused, “when this is all over.” Her implicit faith in his magic made Ashura's heart swell to bursting with anxiety. He shrugged, feigning a confidence equal to her own. “It takes time, but wards can be freed. Paragrat'll manage, and Mother Lamprey will rest at last. As for Urkhan –” Ashura shuddered. “Let the townsfolk decide. Come now. Don't forget your story. I love you.” He helped her with the rucksack.

She pecked him on the cheek and set off down the path.

Ashura trembled with love and fear.

He waited one tortuous hour. He was sending Foxtongue into danger, he knew. Though his wit had thought up the stratagem, he could not be the one to

carry it out; that hurt. If anything went wrong, he knew, he would never forgive himself. The most excruciate hurt Trimghoul could then render him, was to let him go on living.

He looked up at the stars – it had turned midnight; it was Jape Day! – and walked down the path round to the back of the house. There was always a watchman on the front gate, but Trimghoul's mansion was no fortress – it did not have to be – and Ashura's ascent of the fence went unwitnessed. He loped across the new-cut lawn to the back wall. Somewhere in the house, Urkhan was concealed, his tortured mind twisted into the shape of future GodGate, a model well worth the attentions of a rich and unscrupulous man. Ashura wondered for a moment how his old master was faring, but other, more pressing concerns soon drove Urkhan from his mind.

To his right he heard a young woman's gasp, a hint of a scream cut short – not a scream of pain. He scowled. There must be more to Trimghoul's success with women than met the casual eye.

He moved towards the sound of panting, and looked up. There, the window above him. Trimghoul's bedroom? He supposed so. It sounded like Foxtongue's voice. To his considerable relief, things fell silent then. There was a slight pop, a faint flash of ruby light, and he knew that Foxtongue's leg was back, in its proper form, seemlessly joined to her silken thigh.

**S**till he waited. Maybe half an hour later he heard someone stir in the room – and a voice, Trimghoul's. Foxtongue's reply. Ashura bit his lip till he drew blood. It was going wrong, he could sense it.

No, Foxtongue had managed, somehow, not to arouse suspicion. Again the sounds of Foxtongue at climax. Again blood rushed to Ashura's face at the thought of it.

Silence. Long silence.

She's gone to sleep, he said to himself, she's gone to sleep and she's forgotten what she's there for!

No. Again, footsteps, the rustling of covers.

Nothing.

Where was she?

A faint glow to the room. A sharp intake of breath. The glow became more fierce. Then the screaming started.

Foxtongue's.

Then Trimghoul's.

The window shattered. Blood and fragments showered down on the cringing Ashura.

He straightened up. In a pool of glass a flayed mound of flesh, bone and intestine gibbered and shook. A hand rose, glowing, shedding nerve and artery in a shower of sparks and fluid. It fell to the ground. Trimghoul, or what was left of him, lay still.

Foxtongue leaned out the window. Her cheeks were wet. She was shivering. There was a look of fear in her eyes.

“God, Ashura, what did you do to him?”

Ashura was shaking, too. “Come down and I'll explain.”

“I don't think I trust you, Ashura. You've learned black arts for sure.”

And all of a sudden Ashura was laughing. “Oh, yes, black arts. Of course.” He began to giggle hysterically.

Mystified, Foxtongue climbed down from the window and stood – on two legs – beside him. She frowned. "Let me in on the joke, Ashura, or lose me for ever. I won't part my thighs for necromancers. Not again. Ever. That includes you, it seems."

Ashura tried, with no great success, to sober up. "Have you ever wondered at Trimghoul's costume? Or why his windows were always sealed? I mean, when Trimghoul swats away a fly with his mind, he takes off a patch of skin as well! That's the weakness! It was staring us in the face all along! He had power, for sure, but deep down it was all out of control..."

She took him by the lapels, pushed him against the wall, and breathed menacingly into his face. "What was in the pot, Ashura?"

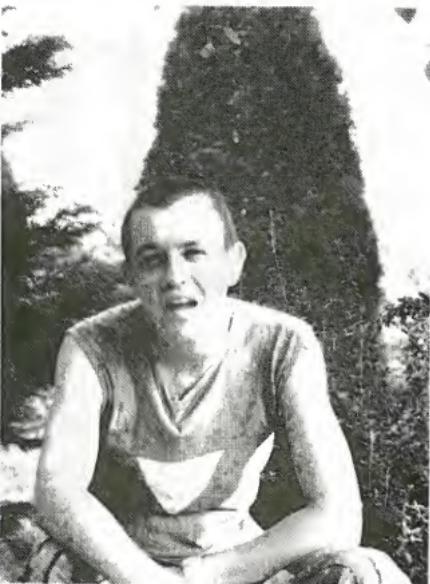
Ashura grinned. "Itching powder," he replied. "What better start to Jape Day?"

He slipped his arm round her waist. "Now, why don't we go back to Mother Runnell's and I'll explain everything..."

---

**Simon D. Ings** is in his twenties and lives in Bradford. Since we accepted the above story from him, over a year ago, he has had pieces published in *Fear* magazine and in the anthology *Other Edens III* (ed. Holdstock & Evans, Unwin, 1989). Hence "Mother Lamprey" can no longer be described as a debut story (but it was!). We expect that *Interzone* and the British sf world in general will be hearing a great deal more of Mr Ings.

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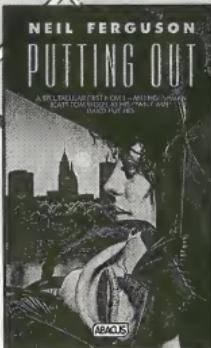
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It is not easy to think that Storm Constantine is much into qualms. The four books she has written so far hook at the reader with barbs on. Along with some pleasures of the text, the three Wroeththu novels (gesundheit) have managed to ask one to cope (for instance) with a cast of keening deathly-pale children, a version of power relations between the sexes that no man could have dared (or, sanely, have wished) to utter, a relentless dowsing of every lay of the land for signs of androgyny-which-is-next-to-godliness, and a span of attention to matters of plot and structure that would put a jumping-bomb on edge; but all the same, in their weird breezy longing-onwardness of diction, there was a dangerous delighted fluency to the books.

And now a new (non-Wroeththu) title has arrived, *The Monstrous Regiment* (Orbit, £5.99), a juicy whiplash slap of a tale which is patently not a singleton, though her publishers have presented it as a one-off; and which is not really meant for grown-ups either, though the text boasts further overflows of androgyny-dowsing, lots of sex-gush homo and hetero, indelicate obeisances to a Man-God who saves the bacon of a flock of Henny-Penny females, hurried swipes at scenes of torture and bull-dyke, a castration or two (recollected in tranquillity), and a simple old sadistic life-spoiling clitorectomy which gets out of hand. But there's nothing necessarily adult in any of this, even when Constantine's trying real hard to be horrid. *The Monstrous Regiment* is in fact (I'm afraid I'm going to steal a phrase I've already used in a capsule comment elsewhere) a menarche weepie.

In the heart of a rather wholesome swamp at the edge of that part of the planet Artemis settled by humans, a young girl named Corinna lives in a great farm complex called Vangery (a name used again and again in sentences whose rhythms tend to evoke Daphne du Maurier — "Last night I dreamt I went to Mandeville again" — but seemingly without a forethought). Here she has grown up under a benevolent rural matriarchy, one much milder than that now being experienced in the urban centre of Artemis, the city of Siliven Crescent where dwells the dread Dominatrix, ruler of the planet (it is, of course, a hereditary position: dominance usually is in weepies). The plot begins. Dire rumours begin to drift into the swamp, carried in part by Elvon L'Belder, a charismatic young man who has escaped arrest and who later fucks young Corinna really nicely after she has saved him from General Carmenya Orallen, who stops at Vangery hotly in pursuit (in fab leather) of the male rebel, and who starts to fancy the still-virgin-but-queuing lass.

# Flopsy, Dropsy, Cottontail

## John Clute

After Carmenya leaps off-page with a sparkly leer to await Corinna in Siliven Crescent, L'Belder begins to spill the beans. The current Dominatrix ("Screw this Life-Presidentatrix-in-Perpetuity and All-my-Female-Offspring-Too crap," we can imagine the first ruler of Artemis telling her assembled Senatrices, "Dominatrix would be so much simpler, don't you think? And how do you like the gear?") has gone right round the twist, is about to forbid all intercourse between the sexes, and plans ultimately to have all men put into cages, where they can be milked of seed without contaminating real people. It's feminism gone too far! ruminates the sagacious L'Belder.

So gloom abounds in Vangery when Corinna leaves for Siliven Crescent to become Carmenya's love-slave, and gloom should. Very soon (after sleeping with the dextrous, fabulously-garbed general) Corinna manages to offend the Dominatrix, who duly has her arrested and sent to the interrogation chambers of the palace. "Another general waited in the room they marched her to, a stranger. This woman was heavily built, definitely man-like, with cropped greying hair and a square jaw marked on the left side by a deep, irregular scar." Oh-oh. But let us not be unfair. It may sound as though Constantine is describing a bull-dyke straight out of any World War Two Nazi Deathsquad SS Whip Stink Head-Shave Gestapo Bull-Dyke Tortures Virgin porno film, but no. This particular bull-dyke may be tough, but she's fair. She may knock Corinna to the floor, but she does not rape her, and when she finally boots her off to be mutilated by gloating medicos, she does so almost with affection. After bondage rites and cunnilingus and extensive surgery, Corinna is once again allowed into the presence of the Dominatrix (whom we discover drunk and masturbating in her inner sanctum while a throng of male slaves fucks a female slave for her pleasure) and it begins to look pretty grim for the plucky teenager, but just in the nick of time Elvon (who has meanwhile been transfigured by the mystical Greylids into an Apollonian phallus) materializes in front of the batty Dominatrix and zonks her with his augmented masculine principle, but the Dominatrix (who is not

your typical garden-variety dotty Dominatrix) has (it suddenly turns out) mystical psychic powers too (we are almost at the end of the book) and slobbers awful female-zone psychic muck right back at the vast, compassionate, radiantly-lit prong, and the whole heart of Siliven Crescent bursts into uneasy paranormal flames, and Corinna (who has very wisely done a flit) now gathers together a covey of hysterical females, leads them to Vangery, introduces them to some nice men, and as the novel closes with a brief Dear Diary epilogue she can be glimpsed entering, with a faithful few, into the old science-fantasy one-two shuffle your shoe diaspora rag.

So why spend time on the book? Bad anti-feminist female fantasy novels cross-dressing as sf — with rocket ships stuck like falsies to their heaving bosoms — must be a dime a dozen, and *The Monstrous Regiment* must only stand out (in 1990) for the utter dippiness of its presentation of the "issues." But there are compensations. The first chapters of *The Regiment*, set in the fertile farmed swamps of Vangery, flow with verisimilitude, detail-work, gossip; artfully cupped in the hands of the book, the farm and her inhabitants seem to have been given to us, gratis, to cherish beyond the needs of plot (which does very soon dump us in the coils of Camp Dominatrix). And human relationships at the farm are hinted at with a quick sure hand. Much of the tale is indeed told with a deftness that seems almost silken, a lubricated slitherly easy of diction that makes one long for more. Storm Constantine, in other words, is a writer who rewards allegiance. What she has most balefully not done in *The Monstrous Regiment* is earn it.

The sacrifice of Stephen Gallagher upon the banality-of-evil altar of Horror continues, in *Rain* (New English Library, £12.95), to cause dismay. He is a craftsman, a wordsmith, a builder of stories, a writer of balance and burden and wrath. But he continues to obey the prime dictat of Horror (which is: Kill the Sharer) like some despondent monk upon a column. In its terrible I-told-you-so pessimism about the roots of the world, texts written as Horror

must follow a fixed curve of plot from the live complexities of the "surface" of things downwards to the parched simplex of the dark, where nothing ever need join again, for joining is at the risk of life. In the end, Horror loves to be safe. It has a dropsey for the banal. So why does Gallagher obey its yawn? The touch of his hand in the page is something real. His pen seems to want things for us.

For most of its length, *Rain* is a beautifully written book. The world it leaves – the Midlands, the Motorways, fragments of the great myth of life in London – is almost pugnaciously true to the touch. The protagonist – except during those passages meant to suggest that she herself is the murderer of the sister whose murderer she seeks – haunts one with her dumbness, her acutities, the human warp and woof of her obsessional hunt. But the world *Rain* eventually enters – through the slow reductionist unveiling of the villain and his psyche and his motives and the things he tries to do – has all the Stylike smugness and ardency of any assumption of Denial. (And only readers unwilling to admit that Gallagher was writing Horror could fail to know, after ten pages or so, who that villain was.) In the closing pages of the book, a strained bolix of plot-turts pumps things to a climax of sorts, but the solitude of its refusal to share worlds with the Other has by now deadened the eye (the moral-uplift escape of the girl seems not so much unearned as unmeaning) and we turn off. And that, of course, is the final horror; that Horror turns the reader off.

That we die a little.

In 1986, Christine Brooke-Rose published an odd little novel called *Xorandor* (which this reviewer noticed, and was quite possibly himself responsible for misspelling, in *Interzone* 17), and now we have a sequel. The title once again bandies words. The subject (and the mode) of *Verbivore* (Carcanet, £12.95) is once again a play on words, dictions, information, genres, word-worlds. The book is a science-fiction story (it is, in other words, a presenting of a science-fiction set of words). It is also a juvenile (a mode of writing in which words are brought smartly forward in their texts to habituate us and to teach). It contains a radio play (which we read), letters and journals (mostly written), the indited words of conversations overheard, memories of the wording of the book to which it is a sequel, transmissions and static and gaps of silence. In its sharp prim way, it is a very noisy book. Its subject, all the same, is silence.

Twenty-three years have passed since the two children – Jip and Zab – of *Xorandor* discovered the eponymous sentient-computer-rock whose

race had inhabited Earth for many aeons, helped it come to word-grips (for what else is a computer but a language of grips) with the extraordinary radiation-data-gush of the wee night mammals who had come, in the binary of an eye, to cover the planet. That book had closed with Xorandor eating the gist of bombs, and saving us all. *Verbivore* opens with a broken sentence in a world transfigured into the words that tell it (rather like the world today), a world of data nets and beams and weddings, a world-noise of information. And Xorandor's children – he is now apparently dead on Mars – cannot stand the barking. They do not know how not to eat data, data stuffs their gullets, they are like *pâté-de-foie* geese. So they shut things down. Everything that generates waves falls silent. Planes crash, computers and radios and all the media-waves flatten into peace. The twins, Jip and Zab, now estranged and professional and eminent, come together with the dreadful intuition that they know what has caused the silence, which they do. The plot thickens and squabbles onwards, imitating words of all sorts. The end (the book shuts) is silence. The moments of high quick quaint cotton-tail fun have lulled us. The brightness shuts.

At some moments of its diction, *Verbivore* remains a children's book (though the children are now grown); at others, it continues to chatter science fiction (but in perky quotes). The effect, perhaps designedly, is of meta-discourse couched in a tone both alienated and wise-acre. Unfortunately, it soon becomes evident that the book is rather less deaf at its wording than the models it kibitzes. At moments when it should be dicting with death, *Verbivore*, for all its monitory zing, has a damaging tendency to tell Granny how to suck eggs. Genre foregrounding, after all, is what genre books do. In a sense, it is all they do. In their bones, genre persons know this (what could be more self-referential than a fandom), but Brooke-Rose seems to have learned genres in the way Margaret Mead learned Polynesians. Growing Up with *Verbivore* may be wise, sharp, clever, learned, sad and gripping.

But it is also very bossy.

## Thought is Word

### Paul Brazier

Words form images in a reader's mind. When these images are strong and clear and they linger, then the prose is good. If the image is faint and blurred, and fades quickly, then the prose is less good. This link is reversed for a writer. If the ideas are strong and clear, the prose they generate

will be more likely to transmit a clear and lasting image into the mind of a reader.

Of course, this notion is too simplistic: it does not take into account the varying abilities of writers to express and readers to perceive ideas. Nevertheless, it must be the basis of all commentary. After all, critics have only the images remaining in their minds to comment upon when they themselves write.

With this in mind, the sole remaining image I had after examining Peter Lorrie's *History of the Future* (Pyramid, £10.95) was of the cover, which is a lovely representation of Earth nestled in the heart of a rose. But this hardly depicts what the book purports to be: "a chronology from 2000 to 3000 AD." Rereading the introduction, I discovered this:

"Within the coming pages then, we are going to witness turns of events which will literally blow our minds, for the view of the future expressed in *History of the Future* is concerned with a total break down of rational, reductionist and divisive thinking." (sic; p.9)

The total breakdown of rational thinking is, for me, a reasonable description of insanity. But while its beginnings may be marked by this kind of distraught grammar and cliché-ridden nonsense, this book does not describe an insane future. There are reasons given for everything. Indeed, Lorrie makes much of the fact that it is based on the speculations of Professor David Bohm, Rupert Sheldrake's *Principles of Universal Habit*, and the financial predictions of Dr Andreas Landert (consultant to the *Wall Street Journal*). Who? Never mind. Everything here is perfectly rational, and as such is old hat to any experienced reader of sf. There is nothing startling. In fact, the predictions, even for a millennium in the future, are extremely conservative.

Now the majority of the book consists of illustrations and photographs: yet there are no captions, nor any attempt, other than positioning, to link them to the words. These illustrations are exquisite – the only memorable part of the book. It's a shame they couldn't have been put to a more creative use than padding out a very sparse manuscript, as they have remained vividly in my mind, while the text has faded to nothing.

Stronger images are conjured by the words in Storm Constantine's *Wreaththu* books, the third and final of which, *The Fulfilments of Fate and Desire* has now appeared (Drunken Dragon Press, £13.95); but they are still rather confused. This confusion comes from a conflict of themes. The central idea is that mutation will generate a

superior, possibly immortal and entirely hermaphrodite form of humanity: the Wraeththu. These creatures can transmute humans into their kind, but, we are told early on, only male humans. Given the extreme misogyny (both before and after his change) of the central character who tells us this, the expectation is raised that he will be shown to be wrong. This is reinforced when we see Wraeththu expecting to develop female traits, harmonize both human male and female roles in one body, and so become a true homo superior, all without absorbing a single female of the old race. This concretization of one of the central debates of feminism – are male and female roles innate, or are they imposed by society? – promised a fascinating depiction of its imagined resolution.

But such a society would be truly alien to us, strange and wonderful. Instead, the Wraeththu repeat human sex roles, and this first and most powerful theme fades away. Instead, the Wraeththu's failure in this aspect is put down to what has been a subplot: the lack of a suitable religion for their elevated form of humanity. The author duly creates one, and the remaining human women are now revealed to have been an active force in its creation. It's a strange form of feminism which relegates men to becoming homo superior – more beautiful, stronger, more sexually fulfilled, than either human sex; and fertile and immortal to boot – while reserving to women the right to mortality, to grow old, and still to rely on men, their own sons before they are transmogrified, for procreation.

By allowing the focal point of the story thus to drift from feminist enquiry into the quasi-mystical area of religion-founding, the author reveals what may be a lack of planning. Or perhaps she made the whole thing up as she went along (this would explain the apparently random wanderings of the characters in the first book). One can only speculate, but given the strictures opening this review, it is likely that the prose might reflect the mental organization of the writer:

“...time had not touched Forever. Perhaps it was the name that protected it: We dwell in Forever; dissolution could not mark it.”  
(p.330, *The Bewitchments of Love and Hate*)

“Forever” is the name of the mansion which is home to many characters. As they believe themselves immortal, this is an evocative piece of writing. Compare it to this, the end of the very next paragraph: “None of them had yet returned. It was accepted among the hara that they never might.” I find this slide from the sublime to the asinine

truly shocking. And yet it exactly reflects the uncertain focus of the plot. Be that as it may, much of this work shows evidence that if she irons out these wrinkles in style, focus and plotting, Storm Constantine has the ability to be one of our finest writers.

**N**o such problem with Mary Gentle. *Scholars and Soldiers* (Macdonald, £11.95) gathers together several short stories previously published in magazines, and introduces three new stories of exceptional power and clarity. I already have most of these in other publications, but the three new stories are worth the cover price alone. Whether on the character level – there are an itinerant woman scholar/soldier and an exceptionally foul Lord-architect who spark off one another wonderfully – or on the idea level – architecture creates forms which allow other dimensions to intrude into ours – the prose shines or gleams dully through the murk, as necessary. As an example, this little throwaway line – The hard smell of coal and steam was still in his mouth (p.12) – evokes perfectly for me the memory of steam trains from my youth, and is only a minor example of a major talent at work. The words here generate images perfectly for me: so much so that I remember these stories as if they were movies I had seen, not stories I have read.

**F**inally, two books by Gwyneth Jones, published as by Ann Halam and out of print in hard covers, have at last been published in paperback by Puffin. *The Daymaker* (£1.99) is a far-future novel of magic which soon betrays its science-fiction roots. It is as fascinating for its metaphoric depiction of a classic solipsistic conundrum – if we create the world we live in, why is it such a nasty place? – as it is for its clear delineation of the problems which beset a growing child. *Ally Aster* (£2.25) is a straightforward ghost story for kids which nevertheless had me scared to go out in the dark for the next couple of nights.

Writing for children is difficult, because they don't have any adult preconceptions to play on. The images formed in their minds have to come much more directly from the words on the page and thus the author must be even clearer than usual. But, in a different way, this is also true of science fiction – expectations cannot be allowed where anything might happen. Thus I particularly enjoyed *The Daymaker* because it is also good sf. It generates powerful images in two very different areas at the same time in one slim volume. It is a major achievement, and also a perfect proof of the truism which opens this review; so, even if you never read children's fiction, you should make an exception this time,

and seek out and read *The Daymaker* as soon as possible.

(Paul Brazier)

## Pots of Money

### Wendy Bradley

**D**ean R. Koontz has a gift for vivid, felicitous images and writes engrossingly weird stuff, but he structures his novels like TV movies. *The Bad Place* (Headline, £12.95) would make a great TV movie: Roger Rees for Frank, Dirk Benedict for Bobby, Sharon Gless for Julie, a Downs Syndrome actor for Julie's brother and a couple of major awards: a really great, first-rate TV movie. Unfortunately, this is also what makes it a second-rate novel. The characterization would be fine as the scribbled two-line character notes in a TV script, but a novel reader expects rather more. The first character we meet, Frank, wakes up in an alley in the middle of a weird paranormal experience and a bout of amnesia. Cut to the squeaky-clean Julie and Bobby having a quick attack of the pre-plot Indiana Jones syndrome to establish their heroic credentials before we get caught up in the story. But what do they think about it all? Who do we identify with? Actually, the Downs Syndrome brother and the giant psychopath with paranormal powers – whenever Koontz does trouble to internalize a character he does it triumphantly and he has a great grasp of the kind of media rubbish (*Star Trek, TV private eyes...*) that people have floating around in their heads to help them make sense of reality. If he would take up script writing seriously he'd be great. If he would take up novel writing seriously he'd be great. As it is, his stuff reads like a novelization of a film script and makes him pots of money – so what, guess, does he care?

**S**tephen F. Hickman, on the other hand, writes like an illustrator and *The Lemurian Stone* (Fontana, £3.50) reads like the text of a comic strip. There's lots of perfunctory questing by various emblematic travellers journeying between tediously similar dimensions via magic stones. You don't identify with or indeed care about any of the characters except for the one who unexpectedly drops dead between chapters, about whom you feel vaguely pissed off. No doubt the comic-book version would have been a whole lot more entertaining.

T.M. Wright has plugs from Dean R. Koontz, Stephen King and Whitley Strieber on the cover of *A Manhattan Ghost Story* (Gollancz, £3.99), and on the inside has 381 pages telling you how there are dead people wandering around Manhattan and gradually dis-

integrating, if you happen to be lucky or unlucky enough to be able to see them. Like Christopher Priest's invisible people in *The Glamour*, it might make you wonder for a day or so if the world really is arranged like this. There's a running flashback to the hero's youth, when he broke into a mausoleum and had a peek at what a dead person really looks like, which is quite vivid enough to warrant a "do not eat marshmallows whilst reading this" warning – but, well, so what?

I'll tell you what. It's a plot. Whitley Strieber is trying to infect us all with the idea of aliens and is plugging Wright because all these walking dead people have something to do with the aliens, that's what. Maybe Koontz is in on it too: I bet they all wear trainers with velcro fasteners which is, I'm sure, a definite sign of contamination.

After all, Strieber thinks it was the aliens who invented velcro in the first place. According to his latest "factual" novel, one of their ships crashed in America in 1947 and the government were so concerned about their helplessness in the face of violation of their airspace that they classified the whole thing as MORE secret than Top Secret and didn't ask Oppenheimer or Einstein or anyone famous to work on the alien-contact, "Majestic", project in case the press got hold of it and it all leaked out (and we all know how successful they have been in covering up mere Top Secret things like Watergate and the Iran-Contra scam). Probably the only reason we know anything about UFOs at all is that the head of the Majestic Project was someone the aliens had carefully selected themselves and kidnapped as a child to prepare for the Moment. *Majestic* (Macdonald, £12.95) – don't read it or you'll end up wearing velcro!!!

Of course a sure sign of alien contamination is an inability to write without excessive emphasis!!! and occasional lapses into vivid present-tense passages, usually in short sentences.

John Spencer's non-fiction *Perspectives* (Macdonald, £12.95) might have been a useful contribution to the UFO debate – I counted at least three sensible things he had to say, which is considerably more than I had expected from one involved in the UFOlogy industry. Unfortunately, the aliens have obviously contaminated his style and his ability to put together a logical argument, so we will never know. At least from this.

(Wendy Bradley)

## Machine Intelligences

### Ken Brown

**P**aul J. McAuley's *Secret Harmonies* (Collins; published in the USA by Del Rey as *Of the Fall*) is an apparently straightforward story set on a human colony wrecked by the failure of the regular spaceship to arrive from Earth. There are mysterious indigenes, who (as usual in such stories) are exploited by some, studied by some and ignored by most. There are also settlers who have "gone dingo," abandoning the Earthly civilization of the city and scraping an illegal and ecologically disastrous living from the wilds. Civil war breaks out and a group of academics attempt to preserve what they can of Earth culture, especially music.

Up to this point the story could have been set in European colonies in Brazil, Australia or New Guinea. But this civilization has brought the seeds of its destruction with it from Earth: they are to be found in an ambiguous attitude to law and order, in a deeply divided society, and most of all in the machine intelligences which have wormed their way so intimately into human life that they are as socially invisible as bookshelves or handbags, yet make all the decisions that really matter. A good read.

Most UK readers will recognize *Red Dwarf* by "Grant Naylor" (Penguin, £3.99) as the book of the TV series. For those who aren't Brits, the plot is that Dave Lister, layabout, bum, and Technician (Third Class) on the huge, slow and smelly spaceship *Red Dwarf*, is condemned to Stasis for taking an unauthorized cat aboard. He is woken up three million years later, the sole survivor of the human species. Since monologues make poor TV, much of the ingenuity in the series went into finding him "people" to talk to – the ship's computer, a holographic simulation of his long-dead boss, the last descendent of the cat (evolved to human intelligence), memories, hallucinations, androids, even his image in the mirror. The first series was watchable, the second wonderful, partly because you could have a great time checking out all the old sf plots as they came up.

Unfortunately it doesn't work so well for me as a novel. The authors seem to have trouble getting the rather diverse set of ideas from the TV show to fit into a coherent plot – a simple "book of the series" might have made more sense. Like the curate's egg, it's good in parts.

Now, three novels where the main interest lies in finding out what's going on. *Portal* by Rob Swigart (Grafton, £3.99) is based on a computer game of the same name (which I haven't seen). It is presented as a transcript of the

interaction between a returned starship captain and the artificial intelligences which are all that's left of Earth civilization, all the humans having mysteriously vanished some years before. The AIs lead the protagonist through various database entries, and together they come to realize what must have happened. The text of the novel uses stand-alone extracts from supposed databases and news services, which do not have to be read in order, to give the reader and the protagonist an idea of the history of the 21st century. There are also simple typographical and layout tricks to guide the reader's eye and give clues as to who or what is speaking. This structure approaches what Charles Platt called "Quantum Fiction" in a recent column (*Interzone* 34). Unfortunately *Portal* is not all that successful. The mystery of the disappearance is revealed, in broad terms, quite early on (yes, I admit it, I did read the book sequentially) and the detail which is left to the end is so vague and wishy-washy that we don't really learn much more. And when the plot heats up, for example during the passages describing the invasion of Antarctica, the text becomes more conventionally narrative-based.

*Empyrian* by Stephen Lawhead (Lion, £4.99) is a two-part novel originally published four or five years ago as *Empyrian: The Search for Fierra* and *Empyrian: The Siege of Dome*. The first half is about one Orion Treet (all the names here are silly) who is sent on a mission to contact a lost space colony. He is captured by the colonists and held in a large domed city, completely cut off from the outside world for fear of the renegade "Fierra" who live outside. Most of the novel is taken up with showing how Treet and his companions learn about the history and convoluted social structure of the city. When they escape, the Fierra turn out to be much nicer than expected (they also claim to live every moment in the presence of God.) I found the book hard to get on with. The Fierra are rather wooden and unbelievable and there are a lot of plot elements which are introduced but never developed. For example, Treet and his companions catch a terrible disease which, after much suffering, leaves them rejuvenated and healthier than when they started. Although the horrid progress of the condition is described in some detail it is hardly ever returned to in subsequent chapters. Not so much as an "Oh, I seem to have discovered the secret of eternal Youth!" or "That's odd, so do I..."! No doubt the second half explains all, but I'm afraid I haven't read it.

Gordon Dickson's *The Earth Lords* (Sphere, £3.50) also involves a captive trying to uncover the nature and history of his captors. This time the action is set in 19th-century Canada and the

villains are a race of tiny people who live underground. They claim to come from the stars, but can interbreed with normal humans and seem to have no history before the reign of Frederick II in Sicily. In some ways it's much more reminiscent of early Dickson than anything he has published in the last 15 years, particularly as regards the personality of the protagonist, an honest, straightforward and highly educated man treated as an idiot by most people because of his great strength and size. There's nothing original here, but it is a much more enjoyable book than either *Portal* or *Empyrium*, if only because Dickson writes simply, readably and efficiently.

Christopher Hyde's *Egypt Green* (Simon & Schuster, £12.95) is a really paranoid high-tech thriller set in the present. A teenage boy is kidnapped. He turns out to be the product of a secret breeding programme intended to develop geniuses who will rescue America after the nuclear holocaust. A rather tacky journalist teams up with the boy's beautiful girlfriend. (I suffer from a big disbelief problem here – when I was 13, no boys of my age went out with beautiful, resourceful and intelligent 16-year-old girls. Perhaps specially bred geniuses have more luck). They piece together evidence of a totally over-the-top conspiracy. It turns out that the CIA and the Russian navy and MI5 and some major Japanese corporations and the President of the USA, and in fact most of the people in positions of power and influence in the whole world, have been participating in a Nazi plot since the end of World War II to wipe out almost everybody with disease, famine, poison gas and nuclear weapons. Of course, it all works out OK in the end, in a denouement as far-fetched as the basic idea. Needless to say, the result is both exciting and enjoyable – provided the reader turns off any aversion to violence along with all critical faculties.

To finish off, here are two reprint novels by Vernor Vinge, both set on worlds struggling their way back to industrial civilization after centuries of isolation. *Tatja Grimm's World* (Pan, £3.99) is a mildly humorous fix-up of a number of short stories about a young woman who takes over first a mobile sf-and-fantasy publishing house that roams the seas in a giant barge, then, by stages, the entire world. Even less substantial, *The Witling* (Pan, £3.99) concerns explorers stranded on a low-technology world which turns out to have developed a kind of telekinetic travel. There's not much to the plot, but it's a fun way to get around: you don't lose momentum when you jump so you hit the ground running, so to speak; this makes it very expensive to move round the planet on one latitude (because you fly out into space or crash

into the ground if you try) so nations, cities, even houses tend to be spread along lines of longitude, with large ponds at frequent intervals for travellers to dump themselves in to lose momentum. But of course you can move from pole to pole at will. Our heroes steal a march on the locals with some drastic behaviour in an unpowered re-entry vehicle.

(Ken Brown)

## Anthologies

We'd dearly like to have recommended *Starfield*, an anthology of science fiction by Scottish writers edited by Duncan Lunan (Orkney Press, £10.95), so it's unfortunate that we must come to bury, not to praise it. For starters, this is not – in its entirety, at least – a collection of new, or even previously unpublished fiction. The oldest story is some 33 years ripe, and Chris Boyce's "The Rig," which takes up a quarter of the book, dates back to 1966.

Seven of the 15 stories are winners or runners-up from recent years of the Glasgow Herald's annual of short-story competition, and they're all extremely short, since the competition limit is 2,000 words. Best of the bunch, and of the anthology, is William King's "The Price of Their Toys," which tells of a fighter pilot crashing to destruction in the Iranian desert. It's a skilfully compressed exploration of the man(sic)-machine interface, an impressive benchmark in a rapidly developing career, and, strangely, only a runner-up in the competition. The winner in the same year as the King story was Janice Galloway's "A Continuing Experiment," a bitter account of imprisonment by aliens that has a sex-war theme. It's well written but covers familiar ground without adding anything new.

"Mr Loom Projects" by David John Lee is a more gentle future tale of love, loss and memories. The plot is slight, but the writing is evocative and worthwhile. The only straight fantasy in the book is Elsie Donald's "Dragonsniffer," a mildly amusing story of a wizard's apprentice with a special talent. Richard Hammersley's "Big Fives" is a short, far-future exchange of electronic letters which defies repeated attempts on the part of these readers to comprehend it. "Spaced Out," David Crook's tale of a beer-soaked local who encounters an alien in a Glasgow pub, also requires a little effort because it is narrated in Glaswegian dialect. But here that effort is rewarded with a story which, though it holds no surprises, carries the reader along with a wry grin for most of the time. Unfortunately, the humour in Louise Turner's, "Busman's Holiday" is unintended. Here rampant Thatcherism has apparently

reduced Scotland to feudalism and control of Glasgow is decided by an annual bus race between "the Bus Lords." This story was outright winner in the 1988 competition, and we have to confess we're puzzled.

In addition to the above, and to the Chris Boyce story (which is way too long) the other stories include Angus McAllister's "What Dreams May Come" and Donald Malcolm's "For Some Dark Purpose" – both flat, unmemorable and somewhat dated. Of the two Alasdair Gray offerings, one is merely readable and one, "The Crank that Made the Revolution," is more than that: witty and assured, and engagingly illustrated by the author. There's a dullish Naomi Mitchison tale of anthropology across parallel worlds. And, for anyone who might be interested, a section of poetry about which we can find little to say.

Two stories towards the end of the anthology do at least provide something more substantial. Editor Duncan Lunan's own "The Square Fella" is a satisfying piece of sense-of-wonder sf, reminiscent of Clarke or Asimov, wherein an intrepid astronaut discovers the true nature of his world. And "King of England I Will Die!" by Archie Roy blends alternate timelines, past-life regression and the Battle of Bosworth imaginatively and effectively.

In principle, the concept of showcasing Scottish talent in this way is admirable, but, all in all, the impression *Starfield* gives of Scottish sf is frankly old-fashioned and therefore (we hope) misleading. The verdict can only be that this is a very uneven collection that does not justify its cover price.

(Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh)

## Swamp Thing and Other Things

*The Return of Swamp Thing* (directed by Jim Wynorski; released on video by Medusa; 84 minutes) is about an organization of rather unpleasant scientists who perform horrific gene-splicing experiments on people. One character is spliced with a cockroach – and then of course there's the hero, Swamp Thing, who has been spliced with a plant. The action involves Swamp Thing protecting various people from the scientists' unsavoury guards, and when the main baddy kidnaps Swamp Thing's girl, to try to make himself younger by mixing his genes with hers, Swampy has to go in and get her.

Fans of the original *Swamp Thing* comic will probably like this film. The action is fast-moving and the storyline quite good, if rather unrealistic. More down-to-earth people will no doubt find *Return of Swamp Thing* a bit childish.

All in all, it provides fairly good entertainment, but it's to be recommended mainly for younger viewers.

**Amityville 4: The Evil Escapes** (directed by Sander Stern; Medusa; 95 minutes) is yet another in the long list of American "possessed house" horror films such as *Poltergeist* and *House* and all the rest. But as these films go, *Amityville 4* is quite good and doesn't go as far over the top as many of them do. The story is centred round a lamp that's possessed by evil and makes nasty things happen to the inhabitants of the house it's in. It should appeal to viewers who love hack 'n' slash gory films.

(James Pringle)

#### NOTE

Fans of Nick Lowe will have noticed that his "Mutant Popcorn" film-review column is absent from this issue. Never fear, Nick will be back. Meanwhile, my 14-year-old son James volunteered to fill in with the above review of two videos. As it happens, we intend to review more videos in future, and we may also be starting a TV-review column. Keep tuned.

(DP)

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## UK Books Received February 1990

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, out books of related interest, received by *Interzone* during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics in the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Alldiss, Brian. *Hothouse*. "VGSF Classics 41." Introduction by Joseph Milicia. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04735-6, 206pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1962; the introduction dates from a 1976 American reprint.) 8th March.

Aron, Elaine. *Samraj*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-50890-8, 598pp, paperback, £4.50. (Historical novel with a fantasy flavour [it's based on the *Mohoroboto*], first published in the USA [?], 1989.) 1st March.

Awlinson, Richard. *Waterdeep*. "Forgotten Realms. The Avatar Trilogy Book Three." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-012630-9, 341pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; the author is pseudonymous.) 22nd February.

[Blanche, John, and Ian Miller.] *Ratspiled*. Foreword by Patrick Woodroffe. CW Books, ISBN 1-872372-007, unpaginated (about 160pp), hardcover, £12.99. (Fantasy art book, first edition; contains copious black-and-white and full-colour illustrations plus some text by artists Blanche and Miller [who are not named on the title page]; Miller's half of the book is interestingly designed, and contains reproductions of some pieces he has contributed to *Interzone*.) Late entry: published in January (although it says "Copyright 1989" inside), but not received by us until February.

Bradbury, Ray. *The Toynbee Convector*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20578-0, 277pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1988.) 15th March.

Bradley, Marion Zimmer, ed. *Sword and Sorcery 5: An Anthology of Heroic Fantasy*. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3389-6, 284pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1988; contains stories by Charles de Lint, Mercedes Lackey, Diana L. Paxson, Jennifer Roberson and 18 others; one of them, by Steve Tymon, bears the highly original title of "Stormbringer.") 22nd March.

Chalker, Jack, L. *The Shadow Dancers: Book 2 of G.O.D. Inc.* Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-51108-1, 284pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 1st March.

Cowper, Richard. *Clone*. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04694-5, 190pp, paperback, £3.50. (Humorous sf novel, first published in 1972; "Richard Cowper" is a pseudonym for Colin [Middleton] Murry.) 8th March.

Dillard, J. M. *The Lost Years. "Star Trek."* Simon & Schuster, ISBN 0-671-62293-8, 307pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; this is in fact the American first edition, with a UK price sticker.) 19th February.

Engling, Richard. *Body Mortgage*. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3342-2, 254pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; it's a near-future private-eye stuff.) 22nd March.

Ferring, David. *Konrad. "Warhammer"*. Illustrated by Ian Miller, John Blanche, Russ Nicholson and others. GW Books, ISBN 0-8605-0000-0, 192pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Juvenile

ISBN 1-872372-02-3, 228pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the author is pseudonymous; based on a role-playing game background, this is the third novel to appear in this Games Workshop series, following *Drachenfels* by Jack Yecul and *Zorogoz* by Brian Craig.) February.

Fisk, Pauline. *Midnight Blue*. Lion, ISBN 0-7459-1848-4, 217pp, hardcover, £7.95. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first edition.) 23rd February.

Follett, James. *Torus*. Methuen, ISBN 0-413-62860-4, 404pp, hardcover, £12.99. (Near-future thriller, first edition.) 15th March.

Forsyth, Frederick. *The Negotiator*. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13475-9, 510pp, paperback, £4.99. (Near-future thriller, first published in 1989; it already seems out of date, thanks to the events of the latter half of last year.) 16th February.

Friesner, Esther. *Here Be Demons*. Sphere/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0552-2, 233pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; the josh Kirby cover would indicate that it's humorous.) 22nd February.

Gallagher, Stephen. *Down River*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-51112-X, 362pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in 1989.) 29th March.

Gilluly, Sheila. *Ritnyn's Daughter*. "The triumphant conclusion to the magical fantasy epic." Headline, ISBN 0-7472-7981-0, 314pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; sequel to *Greenbriar Queen* and *The Crystal Keep*.) 22nd March.

Gregorian, Joyce Ballou. *The Great Wheel: Volume Three of The Tredana Trilogy*. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8321-4, 307pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 22nd February.

Heinlein, Robert A. *Red Planet*. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04647-3, 173pp, paperback, £3.50. (Juvenile sf novel, first published in the USA, 1949; here, it's packaged for adults, and, despite its age, it holds up well; a true minor classic of the genre.) 8th March.

Jones, Stephen, and Clarence Paget, eds. *Dark Voices: The Best from the Pon Book of Horror Stories*. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31565-X, 348pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Horror anthology, first edition; a bumper volume which reprints work by Ray Bradbury, Harry Harrison, Stephen King, Ian McEwan, and many others, with new introductory matter by Barker, Campbell and other horror greats; there's also a useful contents listing of the first 30 volumes of the Pon Book of Horror Stories; proof copy received; there is a simultaneous mass-market paperback edition [not seen].) April.

Koontz, Dean R. *Midnight*. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3272-5, 502pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1989; this author is apparently doing extremely well for Headline, and his worldwide sales now "top 45 million copies"; we remember him from 20 years ago, when he was just another would-be Ray Bradbury Zelazny imitator, selling moody little stories to *F & SF*.) 19th March.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences*. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04739-9, 196pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1987; it "brings together all her fiction [and some poems] on animal themes"; there are some overlaps with earlier collections.) 8th March.

Pratchett, Terry. *Diggers: The Second Book of the Nomes*. Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-26980-3, 153pp, hardcover, £8.95. (Juvenile

fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; we weren't sent its predecessor, *Truckers*, last year, so it's nice to receive this one.) April.

Priest, Christopher. *The Quiet Woman*. Bloomsbury, ISBN 07475-0587-X, 216pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Sf [?] novel, first edition.) 15th March.

Rice, Anne. *The Queen of the Damned: The Third Book in The Vampire Chronicles*. Futura, ISBN 0-7088-4337-9, 573pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 22nd February.

Robitaille, Julie. *Quantum Leap: In the Beginning*. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13642-5, 191pp, paperback, £2.50. (Novelization of a new time-travel series, first published in the USA, 1990; it's "based on the Universal television series *Quantum Leap* created by Donald P. Bellisario.") 23rd February.

Shatner, William. *TekWar*. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-01882-6, 216pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; a first novel by Captain Kirk himself, but it ain't a Star Trek spinoff—it's a futuristic cops-and-drug barons thriller; sf writer Ron Goulart is acknowledged by the author as doing "an enormous amount of work" to assist him.) 22nd February.

Shupp, Mike. *Morning of Creation: Book Two of The Destiny Makers*. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3346-2, 304pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) 22nd March.

Thayer, Nancy. *Spirit Lost*. "A ghost novel." Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0103-9, 199pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 15th Feb.

Thompson, Alice, and Simon Rees. *Killing Time/Making a Snowman*. "Originals." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-011895-0, 154pp, paperback, £4.99. (Two novellas by new British writers; both appear to have fantasy elements; first edition.) 22nd February.

Tiptree, James, Jr. *Crown of Stars*. Sphere/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0471-2, 340pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1988.) 22nd February.

Underwood, Tim, and Chuck Miller, eds. *Bar Bones: Conversations on Terror with Stephen King*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-51606-7, 284pp, paperback, £3.50. (Interview collection, first published in the USA, 1988.) 1st March.

Weaver, Michael D. *My Father, Immortal*. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-51609-1, 228pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 1st March.

Williams, Walter Jon. *Angel Station*. Macdonald/Orbit, ISBN 0-356-18807-8, 393pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 8th February.

Wolfe, Gene. *Endangered Species*. Future/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8325-7, 506pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1989.) 22nd February.

Wurts, Janny. *Stormwarden*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20483-0, 447pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1984.) 15th March.

Zindell, David. *Neverness*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20536-5, 685pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 22nd February.

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## Magazines Received February 1990

The following is a list of all English-language sf- and fantasy-related journals, magazines and fanzines received by Interzone during the month specified above. It includes overseas publications as well as UK periodicals. (Some foreign titles reach us late if they have been posted seafariously.)

**Antonine Killer** no. 1, "Late Summer 1989" (but received in February 1990). Unpaginated (about 40pp). Eds. Martin Day and Keith Topping (or Martina Davies and Katherine Topping - they're jokers, these people). 82 Doyle Cane, London NW10 3SR. Irregular fanzine apparently devoted to Doctor Who and other media matters. A4 size, with black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: the editors, someone called Eric Pringle, and many others, plus an interview with Stephen Gallagher. £1.50 per copy, payable to Martin Day. (The typeface is unreadable, but in a covering note Mr Day says the next one will be "a good deal easier on the eyes.")

**Fantasy & Science Fiction** no. 465, February 1990. 164pp. Ed. Edward L. Ferman, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753, USA. Monthly fiction magazine of high repute. Digest size, with colour cover but no internal illustrations other than adverts and a couple of cartoons. Contributors: Michael Blumlein, Alan Brennert, James B. Johnson, etc., plus non-fiction columns by Isaac Asimov and Orson Scott Card. (In one of his rare editorials, last October, Ed Ferman wrote: "It's not exactly the publishing center of the universe here, which is perhaps one reason we've remained small; this is the only magazine we publish and the full time staff consists of myself and Audrey Ferman." We know how he feels, even though his 40-year-old magazine has at least six times the circulation of Interzone.)

**Fear no. 15**, March 1990. 84pp. Ed. John Gilbert, PO Box 10, Ludlow, Shropshire SY8 1DB. Monthly horror-movie-cum-fiction magazine (five stories this time). A4

size, with some colour illustrations. Contributors: Ramsey Campbell, Duncan Adams, etc., plus interviews with J. G. Ballard, Adrian Cole and others. £16 per annum, UK; £23, Europe; £36, airmail outside Europe. (Note: the Ballard interview is part two of two parts.)

**Locus: The Newspaper of the SF Field** no. 349, February 1990. 72pp. Ed. Charles N. Brown, PO Box 13305, Oakland, CA 94661, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with colour cover and mainly black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Richard Curtis, Fritz Leiber, Edward Bryant, etc., plus Pat Cadigan interview. \$28 per annum, USA; \$32 airmail or \$50 airmail, Europe. (UK agent: Fanfant [Medway] Ltd., PO Box 23, Upwell, Wisbech, Cambs. PE14 9BU.)

**Science Fiction Chronicle** no. 125, February 1990. 40pp. Ed. Andrew I. Porter, PO Box 2730, Brooklyn, NY 11202-0056, USA. Monthly news magazine. US quarto size, with colour cover and black-and-white interior illustrations. Contributors: Steve Jones & Jo Fletcher, Ed Naha, etc. \$27 per annum, USA; £21, UK (the latter payable to "Algol Press", c/o Ethel Lindsay, 69 Barry Rd., Carnoustie Angus DD7 7QQ).

**Thrust: Science Fiction & Fantasy Review** no. 35, Winter 1990. 32pp. Ed. D. Douglas Fratz, 8217 Langport Terrace, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877, USA. Quarterly magazine of sf comment. US quarto size, with black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: Poul Anderson, Charles Sheffield, Ian Watson, etc., plus an interview with Martin Caidin. \$9 per annum, USA; \$12, elsewhere. (The editor announces that he's changing the title to *Quantum* with effect from the next issue; presumably *Thrust* has proved an embarrassment.)

**Vector: The Critical Journal of the British Science Fiction Association** no. 154, February-March 1990. 24pp. Eds. Boyd Parkinson & Kev McVeigh, 11 Marsh St., Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria LA14 2AE. Bimonthly critical fanzine for the members of the BSFA. A4 size, with black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: Colin Greenland,

Gwyneth Jones, Garry Kilworth, etc. Membership of the BSFA: £10 per annum; \$20 (or \$35 int'l), USA; send to British Science Fiction Association, Joanne Raine (Membership Secretary), 33 Thornville Rd., Hartlepool, Cleveland TS26 8EW. (Note: this issue came bundled with Matrix no. 86, a 20pp newsletter, ed. Maureen Porter [who is in the process of handing over to Jenny Glover]; Paperback Inferno no. 82, a 20pp review of paperbacks, ed. Andy Sawyer; and Focus no. 19, a 12pp magazine for writers, ed. Liz Holliday.)

**White Dwarf** no. 123, March 1990. 84pp. Ed. Simon Forrest, Games Workshop Design Studio, Enfield Chambers, 14-16 Low Pavement, Nottingham NG1 7DL. Monthly games magazine. US quarto size (approx.) with full-colour illustrations. Contributors: various. £18 per annum, UK; £36, overseas. (There's a very brief interview with Ian Watson, in which he says: "SF is the only sort of literature relevant to the future. Read, write it and survive.")

**Works: A Magazine of Imaginative and Speculative Fiction** no. 5, Winter 1990. 52pp. Ed. Dave W. Hughes and Andy Stewart, 12 Blakesones Rd., Slaithwaite, Huddersfield HD7 5UJ. Quarterly semi-professional fiction magazine. A5 size with laminated cover and black-and-white illustrations. Contributors: Kevin Cullen, Matthew Dickens, etc. £4.50 for four issues UK. (Note: it's a member of the "New SF Alliance" distribution group, which can be contacted via the address for *Back Brain Recluse* - see our Small Ads.)

**World SF Newsletter**, no. 1/90, March 1990. 12pp. Ed. Jim Goddard, Flat 4, 13 Lockwood St., Duffield, N. Derbyshire, YO25 7RU. Quarterly (?) newsletter of World SF. "The International Science Fiction Association of Professionals." A5 size, unstitched, no illustrations. Contributors: Norman Spinrad, Forrest J. Ackerman, etc. (This was once edited by Gerald Bishop, who fell silent some years ago; Jim Goddard took it over recently, and this is his second number; unfortunately, no information as to how one joins World SF seems to be included in this issue.)

**BACK BRAIN RECLUSE** has an established reputation as one of Britain's leading publishers of new and original fiction. Featured writers have included Michael Moorcock, Bob Shaw, T. Winter-Damon, Don Webb, Lyle Hopwood and Ian Watson. Published quarterly. Singles £1.25 post paid in UK (US \$4, elsewhere £2.10) or four-issue subs £4.50/\$14/£8.10, from Chris Reed, 16 Somersall Lane, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S40 3LA, England.

**Andy Richards** issues regular large catalogues of second-hand SF, Fantasy and Horror. Most new titles (hardcover) and many o/p for collectors. 136 New Road, Bedfont, Middx. TW14 8HT (01-751 3162).

## SMALL ADS

**WORKS:** Aldiss, Clark, Watson, Evans, Kilworth, Darlington, Sawyer, Dickens and many lesser known but equally talented writers grace our pages. Cullen, Walker, Hunter and lesser known artists of equal talent add that something different. The new typeface enables us to add up to three extra stories in each issue - Speculative and Imaginative fiction as well as SF. £1.25 for a single copy, or £4.50 for a 4-issue subscription (overseas orders please add 50p per copy or £2 per subscription). Write: Works, 12 Blakesones Rd., Slaithwaite, Huddersfield, Yorks. HD7 5UQ.

**Small Ads** in *Interzone* reach over 10,000 people. If you wish to advertise please send your copy, together with payment, to 124 Osborne Road, Brighton BN1 6LU. Rates: 25 pence a word, minimum of ten words, discount of 10% for insertions repeated in three issues.

**FREE LISTS** of quality Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror. Paperbacks, hardcovers and magazines, small press items, imports, signed limiteds, etc. etc. Write now, Fantastic Literature (Dept. SC1), 25 Avondale Road, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 8NJ (0268-747564).

# Interaction

Dear Editors:

Jones' and McIntosh's review of Nicola Griffith's story "Mirrors and Burnstone" (IZ 33) reflects a problem that reviewers often have in discussing feminist work. Griffith's story is criticized because her "people" are too reasonable to each other. But these characters are not simple "people," they are women. Contrary to the reviewers' assertion, the female protagonists do not "solve their problems"; instead, they persuade soldiers, women soldiers from a colonial power, to at least present the protagonists' case for self-rule to a non-military agency in the colonial government. Jones and McIntosh are actually saying that they do not believe the Griffith's women soldiers would be so flexible and accommodating, that their identity as soldiers comes first. Your reviewers should be explicit in this criticism, because what's at stake here is the feminist assertion that women soldiers could be appealed to as women, albeit sub-consciously, by female representatives of an alien species. What is not at stake, as your reviewers imply, is the criteria that allow one to measure the quality of a story.

If your reviewers did not notice that all of the significant characters were women, then Griffith should be praised for successfully investing her female characters with fully human qualities, something that most of writers, even ones who write for Interzone, have trouble achieving.

Sherry Goldsmith  
Hutto, Texas

Dear Editors:

While I enjoyed John Clute's piece on Terry Pratchett in IZ 33, I feel the wrong points were being made in respect of the E.R. Eddison connection. Surely, the fact that Leiber's Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser bear an acknowledged debt to Corund and Gro is more significant, as the beginning of *The Colour of Magic* is an open pastiche; Ankh-Morpork is very close to Lankhmar, and the Discworld is as self-contained as Nehwon?

Pratchett is very prone to use as the theme of a book a reference in an earlier one. While *Strata* contained the first glimpse of the discworld, so Mort and Sourcery are developed from a phrase or two in previous novels.

This being so, the astute reader might wish to forecast the topic in the next Discworld book (if there is one). I hereby nominate piracy (briefly glimpsed in *Pyramids*), though I'd like to see a thoroughgoing quest novel which investigates more thoroughly

Dunmanifestin, and the Discworld gods' reactions to a priest trying to create a new one. Rincewind, Master of the Luggage and now languishing in a netherworld, could by virtue of the Luggage's powers (and ship's biscuits) become known as Lord of the Things.

Bring together the descendants of earlier characters and you have the sequel par excellence.

John E. Starbuck  
St. Helens, Merseyside

Dear Editors:

I've been reading Interzone since issue 25 and have yet to find Charles Platt's column unagreeable. He excelled himself in "Report from Utopia" (IZ 33), claiming we might not all want the glorious future of sf! I realized this is true even now. How many people refuse to use credit-cards or autobanks, still prefer radio to TV? A visit to a museum of art or library of science is eclipsed by a preferred visit to the pub.

It's happened already, Charles. Technological advances don't always have mass appeal—should they? I hope in the future people still prefer people to machines, or we'll see a dramatic decline in birthrate! It'll be called the "Gibson" effect after cyberpunk—the kids will be so hardwired into their own cyberspatial desirables they'll become isolated and dehumanized. Sex and violence will be fully simulated—no need for physical interface. A necessary escape—a utopia? Or a dangerous extension of computer game reality?

Christopher Hester  
West Yorkshire

Dear Editors:

On page 71 of the January-February issue of Interzone, you published a review of my book *Lift Off*. It states: "No information is given about the author but we suspect this is a vanity press item from a hitherto unpublished British writer."

I have to tell you that published writing has been one of the main purposes of my career, and as a contributor or editor I have published thousands of articles ranging from short pieces to book-length series in many journals over many years. As a spin-off from my main activities, I have had four books published before *Lift Off*.

So what? The reader is still no wiser. Because it was the reviewer who started this irrelevant hare. The reviewer, who had the book in front of him, and has clearly not opened the covers nor read a word of it. Was that because of the hang-up I have just disposed of? Suspicion now floods back. I suspect your reviewer cannot read. A pity because...no, I'll not plug *Lift Off* at this point, even though it didn't get a fair shake.

There is also a prominent notice in the same issue of Interzone exhorting

readers to send in their comments, and expressing the hope that a lively letters column will be published. I'll wager you a pound to a pinch of salt that you don't publish this one. Editorial vanity will make sure of that.

J. Hall Stephens  
Rodmell Press, Seaford,  
East Sussex

**Editor:** There's always a chance that we'll give offence to authors or publishers in our off-the-cuff comments which accompany the "UK Books Received" listing. We apologize for any thoughtlessness. However, you don't answer the question as to the status of Rodmell Press: should we describe your novel as "self-published"?

Dear Editors:

Interzone continues to go from strength to strength. Gone are the days when I only had an opinion on one or two stories per issue; these days I can come to a conclusion about four or more stories—some even affect me so much that on thinking about them days later I change my opinion. These are the things that good sf stories are made of.

So what would I like to see in the mag? I think there are others like me out here who would really appreciate reviews of older books as well as the new ones. Too often I pick up a book at the market, or because I like others by the same author, and find that it is great and I've missed out on some really good stuff because I didn't know what to look for. How about combining your "Big Sellers" articles (which I really like, thank you) with some info on "classic" books? Maybe you could put it as an open question to the readers?

Dean H. Bass  
Milton Keynes

**Editor:** Okay, would readers care to respond? If people send in their lists of, say, ten favourite science-fiction novels we'll endeavour to print them. Not just the standard "all-time classics," but perhaps out-of-the-way sf books which you particularly admire and which might be of interest to other IZ readers. Likewise for fantasy and horror, if you wish.

Dear Editors:

How about a series on past science-fiction authors whose work should have been more popular—for example, Vincent King (*Light a Last Candle*, etc.)?

D. Inkersole  
London

**Editor:** Well, there's one long-lost name for starters! Does anyone else appreciate Vincent King, and can they tell us anything of interest about him and his books?

Dear Editors:

Excellent news that Interzone is going monthly. I do not currently subscribe (due in the main to my loyalty to my local Chapter and Verse bookshop), but have enjoyed IZ (mostly) for some years now.

I want to plead a case for the interested reader who is not necessarily a paid up of fanatic and who also reads "mainstream" literature and magazines, and wants to be kept in touch with the sf world without having to read sf exclusively. Interzone, with its wider distribution and retail outlets as well as some strategic advertising and W.H. Smiths' blessing, has a chance not only to expand its readership here, but to become essential to anyone remotely interested in sf.

David Garnett, in *The Orbit SF Yearbook 2* criticized IZ because it did not publish exclusively fiction. Good! Yes, I enjoy the fiction (except the horrortinged stuff) but I equally enjoy the book reviews, the cinema update and even Charles Platt (*New York* as utopia ...gulp!).

Please don't delete them to add one more story. You will be able to expand the number of stories anyway once you go monthly, and I rely on IZ to keep my finger on the pulse. As we enter the 90's I do think IZ could take a stab at updating its layout. I appreciate that there are only certain ways fiction can be put onto the page, but with many excellent designed magazine around at the minute (Omni, Blitz etc.) you could afford to "design" it a little and slip in some colour illustrations. SMS is all very well, but why do I always feel like putting my head down the toilet after leafing through more black, depressing, insect-like illustrations? Let's get happy for a change, and good design, modern layout and a punchy presence on the bookshelves won't do your circulation any harm either.

Julian Fifiield

Exeter

Dear Editors:

I am writing to comment on issue 34. The art featured in Interzone has always been individualistic, stylistically varied and often quite well drawn. However, if I think back on what was good about a particular issue of IZ it's always the stories and not the art which I remember.

I was pleased to see that issue 34 was to be illustrated by Ian Miller (his cover for IZ 7 is still my favourite). I was not disappointed, as issue 34 contained some splendidly disquieting images in a wide range of styles. The ragged female teddy bear on page 13, and the mad figures peering out of the small panels accompanying Richard Calder's story are especially memorable.

Also, I was surprised at the variety of page layouts (including the use of page-size and cross-page artwork),

instead of marginalizing each image to the edge of an individual page as is usually done in IZ. This means that the magazine had a more varied and visually exciting appearance. I hope that in future you will give more consideration to the layout of the magazine, so that Interzone may become as arresting to the eye as the fiction is to the imagination.

June Laverick  
London

**Editor:** We'll try! The last couple of issues have been more conventional in appearance than issue 34 (our special "All New-Star" issue, illustrated throughout by Ian Miller). But in Interzone 37 and subsequent issues we hope to take advantage of some of the lessons we learned from that experimental effort. You should be seeing more "cross-page" artwork and, I hope, we'll be introducing better layout, little by little.

Dear Editors:

Congratulations on going to a monthly schedule. You seem to have planned the move well, not hastily, so I have confidence enough to renew my subscription. I haven't liked the "theme issue" idea and I don't really like the all-new writers in one issue, but it's good that you do publish new writers, and the renaissance of new writing in Britain today must in part be due to your encouragement. Of the new writers you've uncovered, S.M. Baxter is undoubtedly the best.

The single-artist idea (IZ 34) is different. Ian Miller is a good artist, though I didn't like the hand-written titles. Putting all the Interzones together, I'm impressed with the variety of the covers.

I didn't think that Platt's article in issue 34 was up to his usual provocative standard. I must be one of those who takes a reactionary view of modern media. It may be natural to "browse and skip" in Platt's words, but it ain't informative. The fact that Platt did it once doesn't prove it's a good practice. The "mosaic" forms of literature he propounds have been tried by Ballard and others in the past and did not catch on. I don't think I'd like the "quantum fiction" that Platt proposes. I think there's a failure of imagination on Platt's part if he thinks the biggest threat from cyberspace is to the traditional novel. What about the effect on humankind of the retreat from reality that cyberspace offers? I'd like to see writers addressing this question.

Of the stories in IZ 34, I liked Keith Brooke's "The Greatest Game of All," which had a clever twist. "Memetic Drift" by Glenn Grant and "An Artificial Life" by Susan Beetlestone both had good ideas in them. The best story, however, was "Great Chain of Being" by Matthew Dickens - an excellent

story by a new young writer. I look forward to seeing many more stories by these writers in future issues.

Malcolm E. Wright  
Southend-on-Sea

Dear Editors:

I co-edit *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* (St. Martin's Press) with Terri Windling. The first volume, published in 1988, won the World Fantasy Award for best anthology. The third annual collection will be out in June 1990. I am now reading for the fourth. This includes all material published in the year 1990.

I am looking for stories from all branches of horror. From the traditional to borderline, including high-tech science fiction horror, psychological horror or anything else that might qualify. If in doubt, send it. This is a reprint anthology so I am only reading material published in or about to be published in the year 1990. The story deadline is December 15th 1990. The sooner I get material the better.

There is a section in the front of the book that covers "The Year in Horror," or "The Year in Fantasy." This includes mention of new magazines, publishing news concerning the horror or fantasy fields, novels we've read and liked, and in my section "odds and ends" that don't fit anywhere—graphic novels, trading cards, pertinent chapbooks, small press activity, etc. I have to be aware of material in order to mention it. The deadline for this section is January 15th 1991.

Please write *YEAR'S HORROR* on the envelope should you send material.

Ellen Datlow  
c/o OMNI magazine  
1965 Broadway  
New York, NY 10023

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Comment

Continued from page 47

are bright interesting people who thoroughly enjoy the active storytelling that their game-playing involves them in. It helps them become more articulate and thoughtful and to use their rational processes more sharply. This hobby and these people don't deserve to be sneered at in this way. They want to read fiction that's set in the worlds they've come to know through their hobby.

"It's potentially an extremely big audience, and it's our intention to supply them with the best fiction we can. What we need are authors who are prepared to take this market seriously and who can write with flair the kind of exciting adventure novels that we want to publish. It's a big market and there is indeed plenty of money to be made. However, we will only pay for quality."

(Tom Kirby)

## Interface

Continued from page 4

### What is your annual income?

Below £5,000: 27%  
£5,000-£10,000: 24%  
£10,000-£15,000: 21%  
£15,000-£20,000: 15%  
£20,000-£30,000: 9%  
Over £30,000: 4%

Students and the non-employed are included in the above income table. I'm assured, on the basis of these figures, that those of you who are in full-time employment are, on average, earning higher than average salaries.

### Please state your main occupation:

Programmers/software engineers: 14%  
Scientists/engineers/technicians: 13%  
Teachers/lecturers: 6%  
Writers/artists: 5%  
Civil servants: 4%  
Advertising/publishing/the media: 4%  
Doctors/nurses/health workers: 3%  
Clerks/secretaries: 3%  
Shops/restaurants/hotels: 2%  
Financial services: 2%  
Management: 2%  
(All other categories 1% or less)

The above excludes students, child carers and the retired. There's evidently a heavy bias towards computer-and-science-related jobs. But among those who responded to the questionnaire we also have: a bailiff; a builder; a butchery assistant; two carpenters; a courier; an environmental lobbyist; a farmer; a forester; a groundsman; a hedge-cutter; a helicopter pilot; a herb grower; a landscape operative (gardener?); a lumber mill worker; a miner; a museum conservation specialist; a nature reserve warden; a painter and decorator; a policeman; a political researcher; three postmen; three RAF officers; a signalman; three storekeepers; a toolmaker; two woodwork machinists; and many others, including a few who give their occupation as "unemployed poet/philosopher and bohemian" and the like.

### Are you, or do you aspire to be, a writer of sf/fantasy?

Yes: 54% No: 44%  
( Didn't answer: 2%)

An astonishing result: we're probably the only magazine in Britain, apart from *Writer's Monthly* and similar specialist publications, with such a high proportion of aspiring writers among its readers. Of course, this also says something about the "participatory" nature of science fiction as a genre: many people who read it also write it, or would like to.

### Which of the following forms of reading are of particular interest to you?

Good modern fiction in general: 67%  
Criticism & bibliography of science fiction & fantasy: 55%  
Humorous fiction: 48%

Horror fiction: 32%

Crime fiction & thrillers: 32%

Historical fiction: 15%

Romantic fiction/sagas/bestsellers: 3%  
The high figure for "good modern fiction in general" would seem to indicate that our readers are more interested in high-quality writing than they are in any given genre of popular fiction – sf and fantasy apart.

### Which of these other areas are of particular interest to you?

Films/video: 74%

Science & technology in general: 69%

Rock/pop music: 64%

Environmental issues: 62%

Politics & current affairs: 53%

Jazz/blues/folk music: 35%

Computers in general: 33%

Sf/fantasy art & illustration: 30%

Comics/graphic novels: 29%

Role-playing games: 16%

Computer games: 16%

Movies are obviously a consuming interest (hence the generally good response to Nick Lowe's film column, which will be back next issue). But it's pleasing to see that science and technology rate so highly. Comparatively few of our people are comics fans or fantasy gamers.

### Which of the following magazines or newspapers do you read regularly?

The Guardian: 27%

New Scientist: 23%

The Independent: 18%

Vector(British SF Association): 18%

The Observer: 14%

Fantasy & Science Fiction: 13%

Private Eye: 13%

Asimov's SF Magazine: 11%

Locus: 11%

The Sunday Times: 11%

Analog: 10%

The Sunday Correspondent: 9%

Fear: 8%

Omni: 8%

Q: 8%

New Musical Express: 7%

The Daily Telegraph: 6%

GM: 5%

New Statesman & Society: 5%

Starburst: 5%

Punch: 4%

The Times: 4%

The Sunday Telegraph: 3%

White Dwarf: 3%

The Face: 1%

I-D: 1%

Obviously, we didn't name all possible newspapers and magazines (perhaps the Sun and the TV Times have a higher readership among our subscribers than anything on the above list, but we didn't particularly want to know that). What is interesting is that the American of magazines – Analog, Asimov's, F & SF and Omni – all have relatively low scores, as do such fringe British magazines as Fear, GM, Starburst and White Dwarf, leading us to conclude that *Interzone* is the only

magazine which reaches the core readership for science fiction in the UK. It seems that less than a fifth of our subscribers are members of the BSFA and hence readers of its critical magazine *Vector*. And the large readership for the *New Scientist* (much higher than that for any sf magazine!) surely reinforces the fact that many of our readers are seriously interested in scientific, technological and environmental matters.

### In the past year, how much have you spent on books (including comics/graphic novels)?

Less than £40: 13% £40-£80: 26%

£80-£120: 10% £120-£160: 10%

More than £160: 33%

We probably pitched the sums too low here: several individuals commented that they spend £160 a month on books and other reading matter. I think we can safely say that most *IZ* subscribers are great readers of books.

### How did you first come across *Interzone*?

Advert in a book: 41%

Bookshop: 11%

Ad in a magazine or newspaper: 10%

British SF Association: 10%

Through a friend or relative: 8%

Reference book or other medium: 7%

At an sf/fantasy convention: 5%

Newsagent: 4%

Club, society or writers' group: 3%

Library: 1%

The above results are especially interesting to us. It's startlingly clear that the most effective way for a magazine such as this to reach potential subscribers is by placing adverts in the backs of sf and fantasy paperback books. (Our thanks to all the publishers who have cooperated with us on this over the years: they include MacDonald/Futura, New English Library, Methuen, Unwin, Sphere Books and – just lately – Pan Books.) It's also interesting to note that only 10% of subscribers first contacted us through the BSFA, and only 5% came across the magazine at a convention. Hence we can assume that the vast majority of our readers are not active members of sf "fandom". Newsagent sales account for just 4% of our subscribers (nevertheless, most non-subscribers probably buy the magazine through newsagents). And libraries are a total washout: as far as we are aware only one public library and two academic libraries in the whole of the UK subscribe to *IZ*, though the situation is somewhat different overseas (a couple of dozen American and Canadian libraries subscribe).

### Are you happy with the design and layout of *Interzone*?

Yes: 81% Not sure: 12% No: 5%

We're rather surprised. See this issue's

letter column for further discussion of the topic.

If *Interzone* goes monthly will you still subscribe to (or buy) every issue?

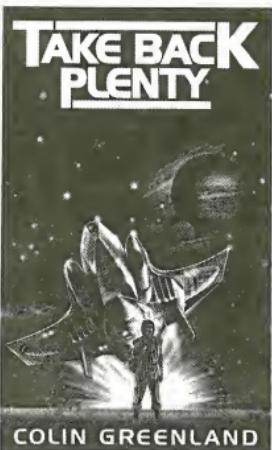
Yes: 83% Not sure: 15% No: 1% This is a very encouraging response, which has heartened us in our move to a monthly schedule. Finally, I'd like once more to thank everyone who replied to the readership survey. It has been a successful exercise.

### EX-INTERZONE EDITOR MAKES GOOD

Colin Greenland's sf novel *Take Back Plenty*, out this month from Unwin Hyman as a trade-paperback original, has gained some astonishingly high praise from Michael Moorcock. He says: "This is everything I have ever demanded of a science-fiction novel. Greenland gives us a vital, vibrant, complex and variegated universe – a universe that you can live in populated by people you can care about. And a great, big, magnificent galaxy-shaking plot that will make you forget to eat and sleep."

### CONCLUDING SNIPPETS

Various stories from *Interzone*'s past year are being reprinted in best-of-the-year anthologies. We're pleased to announce that Ramsey Campbell's "Meeting the Author" (IZ 28) has been taken for two such books – Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling's *The Year's*



Best Fantasy and Horror (St Martin's/Century Hutchinson) and Karl Edward Wagner's *Year's Best Horror Stories* (DAW). William King's "Visiting the Dead" (IZ 28) and Brian Stableford's "The Magic Bullet" (IZ 29) have both been taken by Gardner Dozois for his *Year's Best Science Fiction, Seventh Annual Collection* (St Martin's/Robinson). Our congratulations to the authors.

David S. Garnett persists in choosing nothing at all from *Interzone* for

his *Orbit SF Yearbook* (Macdonald/Futura) – but then he tells us that his forthcoming third volume will contain no story by any British writer or from any British source. (He has even refrained from reprinting anything from his own original anthology of last year, *Zenith*.)

Stephen Jones and Ramsey Campbell are joint-editors of an upcoming new anthology series, *Best New Horror* (Robinson Publishing). Despite its title, this will be a reprint anthology, 170,000 words long, and no doubt designed to compete with the Datlow & Windling series mentioned above. Steve Jones also tells us that his little magazine, *Fantasy Tales* (published in paperback format by Robinson), is in need of story submissions. The address to write to is that of deputy editor David Sutton, 194 Station Road, Kings Heath, Birmingham B14 7TE.

(David Pringle)

### NOTE

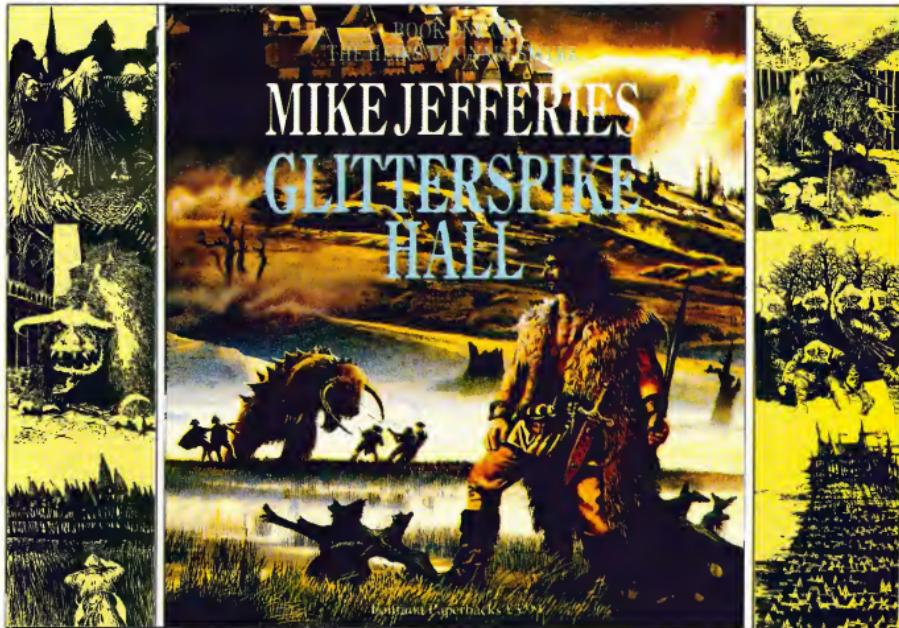
Authors, publishers, editors, filmmakers, fans – send us your news!

Now that we are monthly, we have more space to fill, and our recent questionnaire results demonstrate that *Interzone* readers do appreciate news of what's going on in the sf and fantasy fields. So don't be bashful; keep us informed (and please remember to allow at least two months' lead time).

(DP)

## COMING NEXT ISSUE

A new hard-sf novella by leading American author Greg Bear! Plus the ultimate doppelgänger story, "Learning to be Me" by the brilliant Greg Egan, and an excellent line-up of material from Keith Brooke, Ian Lee and Charles Stross. We also have the first of a new series of "Comment" columns by the one-and-only Bruce Sterling, the return of Nick Lowe and all our usual non-fiction. Continue to read Britain's leading sf/fantasy magazine as it settles into a monthly schedule: don't miss *Interzone* 37 when it appears in June.



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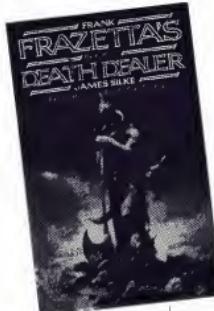
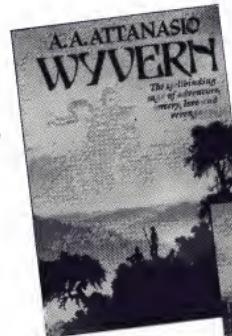
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